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## INDIAN MOSAIC



# INDIAN MOSAIC

By  
MARK CHANNING

*Author of*  
"King Cobra" "White Python"  
"The Poisoned Mountain"  
*etc.*



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TO  
“ ARIEL ”

WHOSE SELFLESS EFFORTS ENABLED  
THIS MOSAIC TO BE PIECED TOGETHER



*Alas! the better portion of my life already consists of my recollections. I am like a tree with a wealth of foliage full of birds, which, mute at midday, awake when the sun begins to sink, and fill the evening of my life with rustlings of wings and with songs. They brighten it with their gladness, their loves, and their disputes, until the moment when death shall touch the hospitable tree. Then it will fall, and scare away all these ardent songsters, each of whom is nothing else than one of the hours of my life*

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

## PREFACE

Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new?  
it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

*Ecclesiastes 1, 10*

**T**HIS is not a political book, nor is it an autobiography.

Many books have portrayed India in one or other of her manifold aspects: she has been represented as beautiful, mystical, primitive; as a mighty political or social problem; and even as an example of abhorred degradation. India herself has judged some of these books favourably, and others adversely. In the latter case it was held that the writers lacked what a learned Indian once described to me as "the three essentials to understanding the Indian mind: spiritual sympathy, some knowledge of Indian literature and philosophy, and a minimum residence of twenty years. . . . If its author has lacked these, even a good book on India can be no more than a snapshot—a faithful presentation of outward appearances."

Life in cantonments is the same throughout India—a 'sealed pattern' Indian military existence. The British officer of the Indian Army stationed, say, in the United Provinces sees, does, and is surrounded by the same things that are seen, done, and lived among by his brother serving in the Punjab; and, minor social and ethnological differences apart, this similarity obtains from official babyhood to pensioned maturity. We all cut our military milk teeth with the same small pains, and eat the same sweets and sour. We all scribble ourselves into debt with chits and face the same language examinations to pay them off. I do not believe there ever existed a subaltern who did not keep a dog or dogs, or who did not at least love dogs. We each of us had our pony

## *Indian Mosaic*

—or even ponies—and loved them too. Finally, there was the great brotherhood of the same sports.

The soul of India lies deep. To get to it one has to break the spell cast by that narrow circle of circumstances.

In *Indian Mosaic* I have attempted to give glimpses of the progressive moulding by Indian influences of a young and very Western mind which began by disliking India and all things Indian, and ended by loving what it had hated. It may have been my good fortune to get nearer to the heart of the age-old spiritual teachings than some others have done, for I had the advantage of learning them from a teacher to whom India herself rendered that beautiful reverence she gives always to the spiritually enlightened. Those teachings, and those teachings alone, are the *raison-d'être* of *Indian Mosaic*. The rest is but a setting made for them.

It may be thought that a soldier is ill qualified to write a book with such an objective; but India would remember that the *Bhagavad-Gita*, one of her greatest philosophical classics, was given by a soldier king to a soldier prince upon a battlefield. Still, it is true that few young officers of the Indian Army bother their heads trying to understand the Indian mind; that fewer make any study of the Indian philosophies or religions, or even think about them; and that yet fewer ever meet a guru, or Hindu spiritual guide,<sup>1</sup> let alone put into practice his teachings. It is neither expected nor desired.

I did all four of these relatively strange things.

The man who taught me was a Brahmin, possessed of remarkable powers, whose gentle influence I am convinced has led me through the years, sometimes almost in spite of myself. Loving India and my guru, I saw in the writing of this book a chance of showing my gratitude to India and to him, those two guiding influences of my life. Lest it be thought that I have given too much space to his teachings, I would remark that those who should know say that “in the

<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit word means ‘one who dispels darkness’

## Preface

few pages devoted to him will be found summed up the heart of Hindu philosophy and Yoga." If this be so, assuredly I was guided in the writing of them; for of these things I know little. However, it is my hope that the system of philosophy I have done my best to indicate may bring to others at least something of the certainty and peace it has brought to me.

According to my dictionary, a mosaic is defined as "the joining together of minute pieces of glass, marble, etc., of different colours to form a picture or design." Based upon diaries, letters, and notes, there will be found pieced together in this book a series of pictures—some vivid, some sombre, and some that seem to be strangely remote from the place they in fact occupy. In some instances, to help an incomplete pattern, the topography and chronological sequence have been changed.

Looking back over twenty incredibly short years of soldiering in Hindustan, I find that much that then happened seems unreal, as if it were a tale of alien adventures read long ago. Perhaps the Hindu is right and life is only *maya*—illusion. Yet the thrill of being in hotly sniped camps, the clear singing of the bugles when they answer the cavalry trumpets at dawn, the smooth, oily feel of fine weapons, the snarl of a wounded panther in the darkness—these things seemed very real. . . .

But, is there an India?

M. C.



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MADRAS





# I

## *A Herald Unheard*

Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind.

SAMUEL ULLMAN, *From the Summit of Four Score Years*

**B**UDDOO the shikaree, squatting in the dust of the station hospital compound, sensed a strange stillness. It might have been midnight instead of midday. The steamy air seemed to have in it an anæsthetic quality like the sleep-medicine which the doctor-sahibs had given him before they cut off his hand after a panther had chewed it. Everything about the place seemed drugged—even the dung-beetles and lizards. The poinsettias and purple bougainvillea might have been painted things. The grey squirrel which had run up one of the veranda pillars a moment ago had flattened out the jerky interrogation mark of its fluffy tail and was asleep.

These things were not normal; they were not the outcome of the tranquil, magical efficiency that Buddoo associated with hospitals. They were evil, and he knew what they portended; he had too often listened to the footsteps of Gadawa, the Gond god of the dead, not to know. This stillness was the stillness of death. The Major-sahib to whom he had been shikaree for fifteen years had been mauled by a tiger. Buddoo had had him carried eighteen miles to the railway-line in a litter of branches which the frightened beaters had made while he cursed them root and branch for their slowness. There he had stopped a goods train by the simple expedient of laying himself across the permanent way, and afterwards had sat on the floor of the guard's van blowing on the bloody mask that was his sahib's face to keep off the flies.

In that manner had the Major-sahib come to this hospital.

For forty-eight hours Buddoo had neither eaten nor slept.

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Yesterday an assistant surgeon had looked sourly upon his squatting unkemptness and ordered him to be driven out of the compound. But Buddoo, being a Royal Gond and quicker of brain than most, had promptly given eight annas<sup>1</sup> to a punkah-wallah to report sick and say that Buddoo was his brother, who had come to relieve him.

Patiently, rhythmically, tirelessly, the old shikaree pulled the detested piece of hide in the manner so deferentially explained to him, hauling it backward before the punkah quite reached the end of its furthestmost swing and never varying the length of his pull. When I saw him he was beginning to 'draw short.' Every now and then his head would drop forward, to be at once jerked up again.

The grey squirrel chattered and scurried away. A red-caped Army nursing sister had come on to the veranda to speak to the tall young Second Lieutenant of British infantry that was myself; for I too was waiting for news of the Major, on behalf of the regiment.

Buddoo recognized her, thanks to the bribed punkah-wallah's power of describing noses, and his heavy eyelids lifted a fraction. The punkah inside hiccuped. It was the *burree-memsahib*—the matron.

She glanced at my visiting-card as if she were doing something she ought not to be doing.

"The Colonel will come to you here in a minute, Mr —?" A Second Lieutenant is given no military title in civil life.

"Channing."

"Mr Channing . . ." Her voice trailed. Something suddenly remembered, she hurried back into the building.

Loosening my Sam Browne belt a hole, I went over to the wall-thermometer. Eighty-four! Phew!

"*Sahib!*" The hoarsely whispered word was repeated a third time before I realized that I was being addressed.

<sup>1</sup> An anna is a copper coin worth about a penny.

## *A Herald Unheard*

Irritably I regarded the monkey-like old native pulling the punkah rope.

"What?" The monosyllable might have been a stone.

"*Kuchh khabar hai, sahib?*" ("Is there any news, sahib?")

Not understanding a word he said, I shook my head.

"*Achchha-a-a!*" ("Good!") It was like a sigh.

The R.A.M.C. Colonel commanding the station hospital came out.

"Please thank Colonel Barnett and the officers of the Rutlandshires for their kind inquiries, Mr——?"

"Channing, sir."

"Mr Channing. The Major's condition is extremely grave. I'm sorry to say that I don't think there's much hope. But one never knows! Matron . . ."

Their voices faded.

"*Kuchh khabar hai, sahib?*"

"Oh, go to hell!"

Two years later, when the bare branches of my mind had borne a few buds of Indian knowledge and some of the self-satisfied stupidity had been knocked out of me, when I had got rid of a few of my Western prejudices and a large superiority complex, Buddoo, the humble herald of my India, became my shikaree and told me the other side of this incident, which I have related standing before the curtain, as it were, in order that the nature of the tragi-comedy which is to follow shall be better understood.

The punkah-wallah was taking over his duties again.

"Have you news, Maharaj?" To a Royal Gond a royal title.

"My sahib is dead, punkah-wallah. I go now to burn him."

"But the sahib-people do not burn their dead!"

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Buddoo thrust into his waist-cloth a crude brass image of a tiger some three inches long. He had been praying to Wagoba, the tiger-god of Central India. The ghost of one killed by a tiger is the most dreaded of all ghosts.

"I will make a doll of grass, and burn it. The god will think it is my sahib's body, and spare my family."

"How came this sahib to be killed?"

"The beast was not dead, and he would have measured it. It struck at his head, and one side of his face fell upon his shoulder. I ran to him and, taking his rifle, killed the animal. Then I tied the flesh in place with my turban, holding one end of the cloth between my teeth." Buddoo glanced disapprovingly at his left arm-stump. "He was a good sahib. Thirteen tigers had he shot."

"Doubtless his wife will now get much money! These sahibs are very rich."

The old man smiled grimly.

"He had *three* wives. But to none of them is his money any use—now."

"Wah! . . . Without doubt *all* sahibs are good; but *three* wives! . . . Were they pretty?"

"He loved them. They were his three rifles. 'I have wedded *them*, O Buddoo!' Thus he said to me when I asked him why he had not taken a wife like other men. *All* sahibs are not good!"

The punkah-wallah looked at him anxiously.

"Has the Hospital-Assistant found out——?"

"Nay. But a child-sahib, who knows no tongue but Inglis, abused me when I asked him for news. I shall meet that sahib again! Perhaps I shall even see *him* struck down by Wagoba, the tiger-god!"

## II

### *The Old Order*

A good servant should be faithful, ugly, and fierce.

ERASMUS, *Convivium Poeticum*

AN hour before I landed in India for the first time three letters were brought on board to me. One of them told me that the girl I loved had been ordered to Switzerland for lung trouble. Another was from my father, voicing his strong disapproval of my intention to enter the Indian Army:

. . . You are making a grave mistake. India is a dying country and will leave you nothing in her will.

There was much else of the same kind, and towards the end of the letter occurred this sentence: "At all events, and for your own sake, *keep clear of the Uncanny*." I smiled as I read it. I did not believe in 'uncanniness'; whatever India might have in store for me, I was quite prepared to meet it when it came.

The third envelope contained confirmation of the telegraphic posting orders received in Durban. I was to report to the Officer Commanding the 1st Battalion of the Rutlandshire Regiment, stationed in Fort St George, Madras.

And thither I went. . . .

A middle-aged man is looking down at me as I write, and my mind, living on the plane of vanished things, stares at him uneasily. I find it hard to recognize in those features the stranger who was Myself, the Self whom I can now only see in a few faded photographs. A hefty young devil returning from the Boer War of 1902, I carried under a jauntily worn khaki tunic a heart that harboured far too many dreams. Even then I was a Maker of Haloes. To-day many of those whom I so hastily beatified and taught others

## *Indian Mosaic*

to worship wear their haloes awry, while others have let them fall into the mud. Such is the vengeance of unfavourable stars.

Of my boyhood I will only say that, among other things, I wanted to become a poet; I wanted to own a sixteenth-century cottage with a library-study opening on to a lawn. And I firmly intended to swim the Channel. When the danger flag was flying my father and I would dive through the great rollers, and, shouting for sheer joy, I would break my stroke to smack their smooth crests as if each were the neck of a horse that had just won me a race. I know it sounds mad, but that is what I did. In those days there was no such thing as death, and old age was hidden in laughter. Youth can never believe in the possibility of its own decease.

The outbreak of the Boer War had found me a medical student holding a Territorial commission and in command of a draft for a line battalion on the South African front.

About a year later a competitive examination got me into the Regular Army. Then came India, and, as I have said, Fort St George, Madras.

While my belongings were being unloaded from the bullock-cart I watched the quick-moving shadows of the scavenger-kites wheeling and shrilling above a speckless, level parade-ground. I felt love-sick and bad-tempered. A sentry outside the guard-room looked at me stolidly, every now and then cocking a disapproving eye at the hundreds of crows cawing on the barrack roofs; they seemed to be interrupting an important train of thought. In the distance the band was practising *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, which I was to learn later was the regimental march past. At rapidly shortening intervals came two quick booms on the big drum, which forthwith caused the instruments to wail discordantly into silence. It was like listening to a shopful of bladder toys being deflated, and in a way expressed very satisfyingly indeed my feelings about things in general.

## *The Old Order*

A little group of Indians came towards me. They were *ummedwars*, or 'hoppers' for the post of my servant. Their leader was an old Mohammedan with incredibly thin legs and a wispy beard that was white at its roots and a bright scarlet thence downward. The followers of the Prophet may not change the colour of their hair with a black dye. He was wearing five medals at varying intervals across his chest, their frayed ribbons secured by assorted and unlevel safety-pins.

Perhaps because my father had instilled into me respect for old age, or maybe because the old fellow was holding out to me only one letter—though he had a bigger packet of testimonials than any of the other men—I decided to consider his claims first. Then I noticed that he was tendering it *face downward*. A shaky forefinger was indicating blankness, instead of talismanic words.

I looked at his eyes. He was nearly blind.

To avoid hurting his feelings, I glanced perfunctorily at his references. There were sentences in them as challenging as a bugle call: "A fine reliable fellow" (1853); "Few men can equal Ahmed Khan in a tight corner!" (1859); "Leaving me on account of illness contracted on active service"; "I hope you will soon recover from your wound." The last one was dated 1879—the year I was born. All were eloquent of loyalty and long service, like his eyes. His name, literally translated, meant 'Ahmed the Chieftain.'

Silently he waited for me to deliver sentence, a wrinkled brown hand feeling furtively each separate safety-pin.

I handed back the precious letters that frequent folding and unfolding had caused to break into separate squares of yellowed paper. The explanation of my refusal was not easy.

"You're too—— I'm afraid I want a Madras man."

"*Dekho, sahib!*" ("Look, sahib!") The shaky forefinger touched the Mutiny medal, as much as to say, "If that doesn't recommend me, nothing will!"



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I made negative noises.

"*Bahut achchha, sahib!*" ("Very good, sahib!") He spoke with gentle gravity. A civilized Mohammedan is essentially a gentleman. I raised my topi—God knows why!

The second 'possible,' a squint-eyed, pock-marked little Madrassi named Narainswami, was the one I engaged. He seemed smart and efficient, spoke English, and had good recommendations. The other five filed away resignedly. Four of them salaamed to the sentry as they went by him. Ahmed the Chief passed him with head erect. I don't think the old man could see him.

Followed by Narainswami, I entered into possession of a spacious, airy room looking on to the parade-ground. Outside its two casement windows was a veranda; in the centre of the room was a blue and white striped cotton carpet, on which stood a webbing bed with a mosquito curtain. Over the bed a big punkah, with a two-foot matting fringe, hung from ropes that came through jagged holes in a whitewashed ceiling-cloth. There were a few roughly made pieces of furniture, including a sleeve-chair with arms that could be folded back. In one corner a door led into a minute cement-floored bathroom containing an oval zinc bath-tub with handles, and a big red earthenware water-pot fitted with a round wooden lid to keep out mosquitoes.

It all seemed rather crude and a little hostile. Narainswami had to ask me twice for my keys. I had, he reminded me, to report my arrival in uniform.

Handing them to him, I noticed a caste mark tattooed between his eyes. Every native I had passed on the road coming up had had a *painted* caste mark. Why hadn't he got a painted one?

"That not good! No sahib's servant have it!"

I decided that he was evasive and cunning.

"Get out my uniform, and be quick about it, damn you! It's in that long tin case. . . ."

### III

## *The Curtain Rises*

Full of supper and distempering draughts.

SHAKESPEARE, *Othello*

THAT night was a regimental guest-night.

Our white mess-kits and winking buttons seemed to find their point of focus in a Major-General with an incredible row of miniature decorations. The Colonel of the Rutland-shires had a good many, but they didn't overlap like that.

The long vista of dinner-table, with a glittering reef of silver trophies running down its centre, was an imposing sight. At one end sat the Mess President, and at the other end the Vice-President. I watched the small army of our servants in spotless white. The way they avoided colliding with each other reminded me of a flock of sea-gulls hovering over something in the water, whose wing-tips never touch. Running diagonally across each man's turban was a ribbon in the regimental colours with a silver regimental badge in its centre. A broad belt of the same ribbon encircled his waist. Narainswami's squint seemed magnified, and he looked incredibly low-caste.

For all the interest anybody took in me I might have been marooned on the top of Snowdon and the general conversation taking place on Mars. I was thankful whenever the band started to play, as it stopped me wondering whether my mess-kit fitted properly.

With the coming of the dessert the wine decanters circled the table in the old auspicious way that is an unrecognized relic of Aryan sun-worship. The President rose. Everybody stood up, and there was a moment's silence. . . .

"Mr Vice! His Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor!"

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"Gentlemen! His Gracious Majesty the King-Emperor!"

The Vice-President's voice was the clearer.

"The King! God bless him!"

The band crashed out a few bars of the National Anthem.

"Gentlemen, you may smoke!"

Dinner was over.

I wandered into the vast ante-room, weighed down by the loneliness of the newly-joined.

The senior subaltern came to me.

"Play billiards?"

"No, thanks!"

"Snooker?"

"No good at it, I'm afraid!"

An apparently hopeless proposition, I was left to my own devices, and once again felt devoutly thankful.

Remained, the veranda and a sleeve-chair.

The Colonel related a series of personally disastrous steeplechase smashes. The Second-in-Command told us how he trained his polo ponies. Shooting yarns started. The Major was dead. Blood-poisoning. *That* was related by an R.A.M.C. captain, who went on to say that to be mauled by a panther is far worse than to be mauled by a tiger, since the grooves in a panther's claws are deeper and always packed with infected earth and putrid flesh. I was wondering detachedly whether one day something like that would happen to me, when suddenly the Colonel addressed the adjutant:

"We're to send a firing party for Major —'s funeral."  
(They bury you quickly in India.)

"Yes, sir!" The adjutant scowled at me for some reason.

The Colonel stared seaward a moment.

". . . Pity these Indian Army fellows are so damned cocksure about everything to do with India! Fancy going up to a shot tiger without first heaving clods at it! . . . Whisky and soda, General? . . . Boy, whisky-soda! . . ."

## *The Curtain Rises*

And so the hours dragged on, sweetened with port. Super-excellent port.

At last the seniors departed, long-legged, be-medalled, spurred figures. "Every Indian Army officer wears spurs," I reflected approvingly, for in those days the Indian Army infantry officers were mounted. The dozen or so medals would—*should*—come in due course.

The glittering Major-General clinked and glittered his way down the wide staircase.

I was free to go to bed. But I did not want to go to bed. Every nerve was vibrant, every fibre afire. My head ached and my feet were pleasingly inclined to lightness. Half-way across the barrack square came a decision to shun the stuffy heat of my quarters and walk down to the sea. A storm seemed to be brewing. Every now and then distant lightning lit up the grey stone buildings and the piled masses of solid-looking cloud above them. A few seconds later a dull rumble of thunder shook the air.

How long would it be before Olive was well again? I wondered. That lung of hers had been troublesome once before. . . . What was this hot and clammy India—the country which she thought so romantic—going to prove for *me*? Her grandfather—one of those exceptional beings whose minds do not become ossified in the astringent waters of officialdom—had often spoken about "the undoubtedly weird Mystery of the country." Was *I* going to see anything of that? Or was it, as I believed, a damn' silly myth? The last time he had referred to it he had sat twisting between a thumb and forefinger one of the black Burma cheroots he used to smoke, telling me an interminable yarn about a fakir in Delhi who had foretold the deaths of Olive's parents: "He said they would both die within a year after their child was born . . . It happened the day before Olive's first birthday, and at the very hour he said it would . . . A carriage accident . . ."

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I remember thinking it a lot of nonsense, and saying that it was a "curious coincidence." To-day I do not believe in coincidence. Everything that happens is in some way or other connected with something that has gone before.

But it was those talks and Olive's often-expressed wish to return one day to India that had decided me to try for the Indian Army. . . . Sauntering unsteadily, I recalled an inexplicable habit she had of calling India "my Mother." It had always annoyed me. After all, she had left India when she was five! . . . In the end, I suppose I saw one aspect of the country through her eyes.

Anyway, here I was—in it! . . .

A lanky figure in white, I sat watching a black ocean, meditating with a premonitory distaste on the fact that it had a repulsively oily look. I felt I hated India. I was certain that I should always hate India. (Sherry *plus* champagne and port is an inflammatory mixture.) After all, what was there to love in India? Her servility, degraded beliefs, and dirt? They disgusted me. My father was right. I ought never to have come to this sham of a country. That ominously dark horizon was just like India—a lie, an illusion. Apparently a closed door, it was in reality the threshold of lit things. I could see them. A blank emptiness to the eye, to the mind it was full of moving visions. Some—some enchantment was abroad. The night was with child, and her hour was at hand. Great masses of cloud, like titanic genii, had drawn a curtain across the moon and unrolled upon the flat stillness of the sea a carpet of soft shadow. Quick-footed dreams stole across it. The first to come were sad things, silent and dolorous, but they were thrust aside by others that whispered eagerly of triumphs to be. The sombreness that enveloped my thoughts changed to bright hope. The dull thudding of the nearing thunder ceased to be the minatory voice of Heaven and became the rolling of exhortatory

## *The Curtain Rises*

drums; the flickering lightnings were no longer visible pangs of misery, but the glad sheen of opposing steel. The gentler dreams fled and others clad in martial scarlet and gold took their places, singing, as shrill clarions do, the sharp joys of war and victory. And I, being one of God Almighty's paradoxes, called out to her who was at home that I loved her; and to them that I loved them. This India that I thought always to hate was calling to me, telling me that she would show me her marvels. . . . Well, perhaps I *would* serve her; and maybe, for the sake of one who called her "my Mother," she would be kind to me.

After that I was sick.

Before turning out the lamp I noticed a paper stuck into the frame of the dressing-table looking-glass. Narainswami had said he would make out a list of the things he needed—dusters, brass paste, boot polish, and what he called 'niltreds'—'needles and thread.' Doubtless that was the list. I tucked in the mosquito curtain. Next day was a holiday, thank God.

I was roused by an armed and helmeted sergeant in starched khaki. It was, of course, broad daylight. Dry-mouthed, I studied uncomprehendingly his red sash. Could it be Tuesday, and I was late for parade? No! It was Monday. There was no parade. And it was not yet eight o'clock.

"What is it, sergeant?"

"The corpse is waiting, sir!"

"*Corpse!* What corpse?"

"Major —, sir, of the Indian Army."

The paper stuck into the looking-glass was an order detailing me to command the firing party. . . .

The memory of my first military funeral comes back to me very vividly: the slow beat of the drums, the scrunching of the gravel under the gun-carriage wheels, the rattle of earth on the coffin. And then the piercing wail of the bugles.

Six months later I was posted to that Major's regiment.

## IV

### *The Social Animal*

What a deal of cold business doth a man misspend the better part of his life in! in scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and inventing news, following feasts and plays, making a little winter-love in a dark corner.

BEN JONSON, *Exploata, Iactura Vitæ*

THE period of my attachment to the Rutlandshires seemed one ceaseless round of parades, rifle-range duties, and kit-inspections. Such free time as I had I spent riding a black Arab stallion called Glory. He belonged to a brother officer on leave, and I ultimately bought him as my charger. The delicate way he put his hoofs to the ground reminded me of a cat touching water with its paw.

The making of the usual social calls in Madras was a trying business. Throughout India custom demands that the newly arrived bachelor shall call on all married officers of the Indian Civil Service and the Garrison. I frequently thought, when going the social round, armed with a pocketful of visiting-cards and swathed in the prescribed blue lounge suit, that matrimony had one remarkable compensation—all calling is done by the wife.

Every fifty yards or so I climbed out of the hired conveyance, mopped my face, and entered somebody's house—unless the 'box' was out. That is to say, unless I saw a small box with the resident's name painted on it hanging on the mud-brick gate-post. In the lid was a slit big enough to admit a visiting-card. It was a humane arrangement, and also enabled the cards of half a dozen wilfully absentee brother officers to be undetectably dropped in with one's own. Eventually each labourer received the same hire—an invitation to dinner.

## *The Social Animal*

Unchangeable and highly organized is the Anglo-Indian system of social hospitality.

In Madras the stately Georgian mansions of the official gods have either curved or square pillared porticoes and deep upper and lower verandas screened with green bamboo sun-blinds. Miniature palaces, they are surrounded by walled enclosures that are half park, half Botanical Gardens. Some of them are washed a dazzling white, others pale blue; and I remember a pink one. Very imposing they looked, with their lawns like table-cut emeralds, and red, carefully watered drives bordered with strips of vivid green grass and banks of blue cannas. The shiny sword-like fringes of tropical palms scratched viciously the hood of my hired bazaar conveyance, or *tum-tum*, as we brushed by them in a dowdy progress towards the portals of Greatness. Cobalt-blue jays, golden orioles, whole flocks of emerald-green parrots, and bands of ash-coloured 'seven sisters' were among the birds I noticed. The latter are like big sparrows, and have staring yellow eyes and chatter incessantly.

Each time I arrived under one of these porticoes I mounted the wide white steps and repeated my one Hindustani sentence:

"*Memsahib ghar-par hai?*" ("Is the Memsahib at home?")

A servant then ushered me into the drawing-room.

The Indian drawing-room is a treacherous revealer of intimate secrets. It will tell you as much as a gossiping *ayah* could about the financial status of its owner's husband and the family affairs. The curtain material, the furniture, photographs, and the walls are its tongues. In a different way from the starkly male Mess, it is an heroic effort to materialize in majestic India the intimate charm that is England. But it cannot be done. In Cawnpore I saw a three-foot cobra slide along a Tottenham Court Road sofa piled with Liberty cushions. India refuses to be disguised.



## *Indian Mosaic*

Surrounded by the comfort and feminine daintiness of those rooms, I bewailed the miserable inferiority of the unmarried junior officer, and compared to their elegance the whitewashed room in which my dog slept chained to a table-leg and where the only wall-decorations were my accoutrements hanging from nails against a crookedly fixed square of cheap red cloth. Clearly, I would have to marry!

The up-country drawing-rooms are the 'poor relations' of those in the Presidency towns; there the memsahibs welcomed even the more important news from Outside with a strained nonchalance that, only now, I realize had a certain pathos. "We are going home on leave next year," I was assured. . . . And while she waits for another hot weather season to pass the up-country memsahib sighfully turns the pages of an Army and Navy Stores catalogue, and dreams of all the essentially English things she would like to buy.

Only those who have lived in India know the quiet heroism and staunch loyalty of the memsahib. Her virtue is no legend. Those who say to the contrary lie. Her polar inaccessibility in the eyes of the Indian man was one of the foundation-stones of our power in India—until three Indian Divisions were sent to France and there saw, heard, and did things that were treason and heresy to them in India. . . . How should splendid fellows, whose country knows not solicitation, reason otherwise?

My visit ended, I would be conducted back to my shabby *tum-tum* by an Indian butler whose manner was that of a duke conducting a royal prince. There is an inimitable perfection about a well-trained Indian servant. Whatever his faults may be as a house-servant, there is not his equal when travelling or camping. Especially does he shine in an emergency. I know of one butler who produced a well garnished tea-tray for his sahib and memsahib half an hour after an earthquake had flattened out the station, apologizing

## *The Social Animal*

to them, as they sat staring at the ruins of their home, for the absence of the sugar-bowl.

The affection of Indian servants for their sahibs' children quite frequently verges on the beautiful. I knew a sweeper who gave his life to save a baby from a cobra. And when a certain sahib's small son died his ayah said she would die also. And she did: her heart was broken.

Many believe that the Indian is ungrateful, adducing as a proof the argument that there is no word for 'gratitude' in his language. There are over two hundred Indian dialects and there are in them many words for 'gratitude.' I know at least a dozen common Indian expressions that are eloquent of gratitude; and the Vedas, or Indian scriptures, inculcate gratitude as an essential virtue, while the Koran is emphatic on the necessity for it. The Indian may not seem to believe that, in receiving a favour, he incurs a lifelong indebtedness. If he is a Hindu, he holds that all that happens to him is the result of his actions in a previous existence, and that good actions are their own reward. If he is a Mohammedan, he believes in destiny. For both, whatever life brings is to be accepted with resignation. Therefore, if the Indian's manifestations of gratitude take the somewhat disappointing form of a dignified pleasedness or a stoical impassivity, we may concede that it is not necessarily because he is devoid of gratitude.

Rudyard Kipling immortalized Gunga Din. There are still plenty of his kind.† Faithfulness to him whose salt you eat may be an almost forgotten virtue in the West, but it is still an unwritten law in India.

# V

## *The Depths and the Heights*

The East bow'd low before the blast,  
In patient, deep disdain.  
She let the legions thunder past,  
And plunged in thought again

MATTHEW ARNOLD, *Obermann Once More*

**I**N due course I set out to explore the city.

It did not seem as if I were visiting it for the first time, but as though I had come back to it all, or as if a vaguely recollected dream were repeating itself in real life. Yet one of the first things I encountered was Death; the corpse of a girl was being carried along on the shoulders of four men moving at a jog trot. The pinched face was yellow with saffron, and the stiff body rose and fell indecently with the sagging 'give' of the two long bamboos between which it lay on a ladder-like arrangement of string. A pair of white oxen yoked to a cartload of red earthenware lurched sideways to make way for her. They had blue bead necklaces that lifted the soft edge of their swaying dewlaps, and on their backward-curved horns little bells jingled. Jostling crowds of brown-skinned men with white muslin middles and women in bright *saris*, with their hair done in a heavy bunlike loop at the side of their heads, surrounded me like a sea. I noticed that, despite the oppressive heat, none of them was sweating, and the faint crowd-odour was not too unpleasant. The sunlight seemed to have a curious 'steadiness.' That is the only word that describes what I mean, and it does so badly. Fierce and pale, all the colour seemed to have drained out of it into the people and the things about me, leaving only the heat, and that the air was soaking up as a sponge soaks up water.

## *The Depths and the Heights*

I had expected to see gorgeously jewelled rajahs under gold umbrellas riding on elephants. I had come prepared to hire an elephant myself, and it was a shock to find that the normal means of progress was by tram and that the only umbrellas to be seen were black cotton ones carried by coolies. (In Malabar the dignity of the carrier is to be judged by the length of the stick of the palm-leaf umbrella he carries; a Brahmin has one nearly as long as himself, while that of a Sudra is only a few inches in length.) Elephants' *heads* were everywhere; little red-daubed, elephant-headed stone statues with an abominous man's body. Strings of marigolds threaded like a daisy-chain were hung round the deformed necks. Some of these statues had four arms, holding respectively an elephant goad, a conch, a conch shell, and a cup containing little cakes on which the god is supposed to feed himself. By the god's side was the rat he always rides on. The Hindu attributes exceptional wisdom and foresight to the rat.

In the South the name of that god is Ganapati (Lord of Hosts); in the North he is called Ganesh. The god of Riches and Business, he is essentially the people's god. (The shape of the continent of India is roughly that of a short-trunked elephant's head seen in profile.)

In the doorways and courtyards of the mud-brick houses--their flimsy wooden balconies reminded me of Italy, save that they had roofs over them--extraordinarily ugly women were squatting in pairs, one behind the other, searching intently each other's heads for lice. These they cracked between their thumbnails without even interrupting their chatter. I wondered disgustedly what they could find to say about that sort of hunting. They didn't even look at poor "Dead India" as she went by. . . . "Evidently a live louse is more important than a dead girl. My God, what mentalities!" says my diary.

Other women, of all ages, were carrying brass vessels

## *Indian Mosaic*

on their heads, steadying them with one gracefully curved arm and swaying nonchalantly along to the faint music of their silver anklets. Their wrists were loaded with blue or red glass bangles. Some of them had a small naked child securely seated astride one swelling hip. They might have stepped out of a Bible illustration, save that I found every one of them ugly.

Everywhere there were flies—flies and mangy-looking pariah-dogs who looked as thirsty as I was.

Across the street was the shop of a lemonade and sherbet seller. Unfortunately he offered me my glass of it in a tumbler which I had seen him wipe with a rag on which he had just blown his nose. He listened impassively to all I had to say, and then nonchalantly threw away the rejected contents of the tumbler. India is too old and too wise to show, often, either surprise or curiosity; but her disdain is razor-edged.

Shops? There were no shops as we know them; only small square openings about three feet above street-level, most of them with a single, detached and placid occupant, aloof but content. An ivory-carver was working on a delicate figure of the four-armed Parvati, the wife of the great god Siva; occasionally he laid it down to talk to a passer-by. With ease and completeness he switched his concentration; yet all the time he was speaking his supple fingers restlessly caressed his work. Parenthetically, I may remark that Indians always welcome a fellow-Indian kindly, whether he is known to them or not. And always they address each other as "Brother." It rings true, too.

A Methuselah of a goldsmith, whose even smaller and barer shop was next door to the ivory-carver, was making a woman's girdle composed of hundreds of minute gold roses. In spite of his cracked spectacles mended with string, he looked a venerable old rogue. The Indian goldsmith is not exactly renowned for his honesty. But I stood and watched

## *The Depths and the Heights*

him also. Every petal was a perfect piece of work, though his only visible implements were a pair of pliers and a tiny hammer and anvil. Occasionally he waved a mouldy-looking crow's wing over a handful of charcoal glowing in a red earthenware pan, in the middle of which was a pewter soup-spoon containing a little molten gold.

The Indian ivory work and jewellery are the most exquisite in the world; but I did not know that when I bought the smooth-limbed little Parvati. She had long since vanished, taking with her a tiny gold rose. . . .

My main objective that day was to find a monkey-god temple; not because the senior subaltern, trying to be funny, had told me that the chief priests in Hanuman temples were orang-utans, but because he had unintentionally confirmed in me a vague belief that there must be something queer about a temple of which the god is an ape. Anyway, I had always had a liking for monkeys.

I found a temple of Hanuman the Monkey-god. I recognized it because on one of the walls was painted the figure of an ape-headed man with a long tail. Outside the entrance a boy with the red-and-white trident of Siva painted between his eyes was selling garlands like floral cables, made of Indian pinks, Bengal roses, and strident marigolds. Thin strips of gold and silver tinsel were twined in and out of them. Whether they were intended for the god or for the worshippers I did not know, any more than I knew whether the garlands brought to St Paul by the priests of Jupiter were for the ox or for him<sup>1</sup>—the difficulty being that Indians wear garlands round their necks on great occasions.

As I entered the temple courtyard an aged Brahmin came up to me. To my disgust he was naked to the waist, and the sacred triple thread looped over his left shoulder traversed the white hairs on his chest like a thin path through a snowed-up forest. I looked upon him with no favour.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiv, 13

## *Indian Mosaic*

Seeing that I could not understand what he was saying, he resorted to signs. I was not to go into the temple—only into the courtyard. It was not intolerance; to him it was logical reasoning. I was one of an alien and opposed faith, whose visit would therefore be unwelcome to the god. A sudden clanging of gongs and tinkling of bells died away into the piercing drone of a conch, as if the monkey-god were approving the warning of his priest. . . .

Lithe, long-armed monkeys swarmed everywhere, springing and swinging in the trees and coconut-palms, clinging to the carvings on the temple roof, and sitting in rows on the red-tiled coping of the walls. I observed one of them clutching to her breast what at first I thought to be a chunk of coconut fibre. It was the tiny, shrivelled body of a dead baby monkey. With her free paw she was feeding herself. I don't quite know how to define my theological attitude, but I felt Hanuman ought to be asked to do something for her.

As I left a hideously ravaged leper followed me, dragging a pinkish mass of elephantine leg. Elephantiasis is common in Southern India. Its Sanskrit name, *hathi-pada*, means 'elephant-foot,' and those who have it are considered to be cursed by Ganesh.

Heat and colour; life and death; ugliness and noise; disease and dust! I was seeing India in her *déshabillé*, and she was not making me feel at home.

## VI

### *I Drive Furiously*

An horse is a vain thing for safety.

*Psalm xxxiii, 17*

IN Madras I bought a very fast-trotting chestnut pony. I knew next to nothing about horses; they had only come into my scheme of things when an iron-jawed roan as high as a house and of uncommonly bad manners took charge of me in the Scottish Horse, in South Africa a few months before.

To have a pony of my own, and a high-stepper at that, seemed, quite literally, to be a magically unreal state of affairs.

The lean and murderous-looking Afghan dealer haggled over the price for a couple of days, starting at five hundred rupees. I believe he took a sadistic pleasure in inflicting all the tantalizing suspense of that uncompleted purchase. But financial stringency helps one to bargain brazenly. At three hundred and fifty rupees, however, further hesitation was swept away by his statement—impressively translated by Narainswami—that the animal had four kidneys. It was, of course, merely a Mohammedan way of expressing high praise of a horse; but at the time I felt I was buying a prodigy—a four-cylinder Pegasus whose name was Windy because he moved like the wind.

I had to borrow the money to pay for Windy. Two *sharrāfs*, or Marwari moneylenders, whom Narainswami found, lent it to me. They were short, dark men, fat and oily, who wore many silver rings. Aslant on their heads were flat, rather greasy triangular turbans made of thin ropes of twisted red cloth. Their smiles were ingenuous and their manner friendly; it was a pleasure and an honour, they said, to lend money to so distinguished a sahib, but



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the sum was far too small. . . . To me the interest seemed extraordinarily low—one anna in the rupee per mensem. But it was compound interest, and it worked out at something like 107 per cent. per annum. A year later an English lawyer whom I employed to free me from the toils of those leeches told me that there are something like eighty tribes of moneylenders in Rajputana, the ubiquitous Marwari or village merchant being one of them.

Before starting on my first drive with Windy I had some trouble with Ram Bux, my *sais*, or Indian groom—an ancient with a face like a dried quince into which two black currants had been stuck. He stubbornly refused to remove from round the pony's neck a string of big blue china beads, stating that they were blessed beads and would bring us luck.

They were removed.

It soon became clear that Windy was well-named. In the words of the Persian poet, "He left the wind behind him as the wind leaves the dust." But he had no intention of obeying any bit ever invented by man. So we had an exhilarating progress through the main Madras thoroughfares. The showy trot soon became a mad gallop. Ram Bux prayed aloud. I leaned back and sawed. Neither prayers nor sawings had the slightest effect.

Miles up the Bangalore road an elephant stepping out of a cane-brake put an end to Windy's antics. More correctly, it caused him to precipitate us down a three-foot embankment. It was, I believe, a spectacular smash. When I came to he was still lashing out at the fragments of a resplendent new trap.

Some days later I sold him to a wealthy young native who apparently did not mind if he slew a few pedestrian Indians. Maybe his Oriental imagination was kindled by a casual mention of the four kidneys.

I would not have related Windy's short and agitated history if it had not been for an interesting conversation

## *I Drive Furiously*

connected with him which was afterwards related to me. It took place in the Madras *serai*, or Indian inn, frequented by the Pathan horse-dealers of the North-west Frontier. This particular dealer came from Kabul, whose men are wise indeed in the buying and selling of horses.

"Your sahib is a clever sahib, O *sais*!" The horse-coper had only one eye, but it was as sharp as a stabbing-knife.

"He is a good sahib. He does not give *galee* [abuse] to his servant-people," sighed Ram Bux.

"Therefore it is that I would sell him the chestnut Windy!"

"It has a small star between its eyes, Khan sahib, and the curl points towards the tail. The beast is not lucky!"

"It is a bringer of money to those who serve it!"

"I am a poor man, and old."

"Thou makest four rupees a month on the forage account!"

"It is a lie. I make but three! I am a poor man."

"Will this sahib buy?"

"Perhaps—if I advise him to buy. This month I intend to marry a young wife. I need forty rupees to feed the Brahmins."

"I once gave a clever *sais* one rupee for each hundred rupes of a pony's price—after I had been paid!"

Ram Bux's eyes shone.

"But that was not for a killer-pony!"

Silence.

"O Allah! Has Satan already torn out thy tongue, thou old fool?"

Ram Bux smiled seraphically. He had three teeth. "I have remembered the name of a Bania who will lend me the money. But he charges much interest. I am poor man. Therefore I shall go to that other horse-dealer, who has a grey——"

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"He is a seller of spavins! Your sahib will not buy such a horse."

"Nor would he buy a killer—if he were told!"

"Three rupees . . . and eight annas!"

"That grey——"

"Three rupees and *twelve* annas!"

"—and yesterday my sahib asked me whether I knew of a grey horse. It is strange!"

"May Shaitan eat your liver! Four rupees, then."

"The mother of my wife-to-be wants a loan of ten rupees *to-day*. If I give it not my face will be blackened."

Ten rupees chinked a musical accompaniment to curses in guttural Pushtu.<sup>1</sup>

"May God give you long life, dealer!"

"To-morrow I will bring the pony, *sais*!"

Ram Bux shivered. "Master of the world! My sahib trusts me!"

"While the horse wears about its neck that string of blue beads blessed by a holy *pir* [saint] there is no danger. I swear it!"

To do old Ram Bux credit, when he had confessed these ordinary things to me he wept.

<sup>1</sup> The trans-frontier language of the North-west

## VII

### *A Story is Told*

... A lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,  
Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong.

TENNYSON, *The Lotos-eaters*

MIRZA<sup>1</sup> MOHAMMED ISFAHANI, teacher of Persian, looked rather like an Oriental Pan. His face had a thousand wrinkles, and he came from Isfahan, a place that he assured me was known as "Half the world" because of the extraordinary talent of its men. Whether it was because of this that he was so continually in request at weddings and funerals I do not know; but whenever he was late in coming to me—which was often—he explained that he had just hurried away from one of these functions.

"Where, sahib, I extemporized a most beauteous poem and drank wine!"

There was never any doubt about the wine.

One day I asked him why he was so fond of a small amethyst ring he wore.

"An amethyst, sahib, protects against the effects of wine, just as a turquoise or an emerald protects against snakes and the Evil Eye, and a ruby against sickness. You should wear a coral-stone, to protect you against the rays of the sun."

Narainswami swore that the old man kept a harem of very young girls. But it seemed to me that "O Cup-bearer, in the time of Spring, bring wine!" was much more likely to be the cause of those late arrivals which he carried off with such delightful dignity. As Indian incomes go, he could be accounted a wealthy man. He told me that he never had less

<sup>1</sup> 'Mirza' is an honorary title, from the two Persian words *amir* *zadah* ('nobly born'). When prefixed to a name it means a secretary or *munshi* ('teacher'), suffixed, it means 'Prince'.

## Indian Mosaic

than four pupils, which meant four rupees a day; so he could well afford luxuries like the silk coats and turbans which he loved to wear. According to his own account of himself he was an unjustly persecuted Doctor-cum-Magician who had been driven out of Persia because he had discovered that a her had a circulatory system!

Keeping a straight face, I remarked that it seemed to me a rather useful discovery, and not one for which he should have been persecuted.

He placed a hand over his mouth to denote surprise at my obtuseness.

"Sahib, the Cadi—May Satan the Stoned One take him!—*also* was a doctor, and, becoming jealous of me, said that my medical treatment of certain children had caused their deaths. But he had had them and their parents transported by night, and *therefore* they disappeared! God knows that I speak the truth when I say that they are all alive and well!"

Invariably when he had taken off his slippers at the doorway of my room a good-looking boy named Sheroya, who always accompanied the old man and carried his books for him, would dust his master's feet.

Seen across the years, all those trifling incidents have a certain grace, and even a beauty; but at the time I saw in them merely instances of what my diary says I used to call "the degraded servitude of these Orientals."

Persia is the land of the professional story-teller, and Mirza was a born *raconteur*. He told me many interesting things about a story-teller's training, which, like that of the nautch-girl, starts at childhood. He said that most of the stories they tell are ancient ones, handed down by one story-teller to another.

"From father to son, you mean?"

"No, sahib; from man to man. A story-teller should not marry. He must live in the world of dreams. A wife would become unhappy, and beat him!"

## *A Story is Told*

I made a note of what he said were the "very necessary qualifications" for a good story-teller, and I gave them, without comment, as nearly as possible in the way he told them to me:

"In addition to having read all the known books on love and heroism, the teller of stories must have suffered greatly for love, have lost his beloved, drunk much good wine, wept with many in their sorrow, have looked often upon death, and have learned much about birds and beasts. He must also be able to change himself into a beggar or a caliph in the twinkling of an eye."

A pretty comprehensive programme!

When, after the usual pious invocation of Allah the Most Merciful, the old Mirza told me a Persian story for the first time I understood why those qualifications were necessary. Although that particular tale was about the usual beautiful princess in the usual tower guarded by the usual lion, it was really quite different from the usual story about these things. I have said that Mirza was old, but during that telling he became metamorphosed before my eyes: he turned himself into a handsome, but rather mincing, young prince, a weeping girl, a stalwart tyrant father, a gigantic Djinn, and, most realistically of all, a chained lion.

I considered the prince, the girl, her father, and the Djinn to be good, but rather noisy, bits of acting; I was far more interested in the words he was using than his gestures and astounding facial play. But when that lion made its presence known by a rasping snarl I sat up and gasped, it was so real. . . . The Persian equivalent of young Lochinvar, on the proper kind of white horse, then rode up to reconnoitre the tower (thunderous growls and snarls), addressed the lion (more snarls and a warning roar), and then tried to pass the chained beast. A hand at each side of his mouth, Mirza roared till his body shook.

At this point, the bamboo sunblind over my door was

## *Indian Mosaic*

pushed aside a few inches and a pair of eyes looked in at me. But I had no time for them; the Persian hero and the guardian lion were having an all-in fight. There were ear-piercing cries of “*Ya Allah!*” “*Shaitān!*” “*Badmash!*” from the hero, occasional screams and ejaculations from the justifiably excited princess, and a veritable thunderstorm of leonine fury. Teeth were gnashed, curved claws swept the air, and cries of rage, pain, and terror alternated; the whole gamut of emotions of man, woman, and beast harrowed and delighted my unaccustomed ears and eyes.

When victory had been gained and Love Triumphant took Forlorn Beauty into his arms, with a foot on the lion's carcass, I turned my gaze from the tears I saw glistening on Mirza's furrowed cheeks to the sunblind over my door. It was now unashamedly pushed back a foot. Out in the passage was a group of spellbound servants. Most probably they did not understand a single word of Persian, but they certainly knew what a lion sounded like.

To-day, when I hear the flaccid, monotonous voices that tell stories over the ether, I think with a sigh of Mirza's story and his “very necessary qualifications.” The art of story-telling is utterly unknown in the West. We have not in us the requisite poetry and imagination; and we have not been told the secret.

Hindustani, or Urdu, is the common tongue of a hundred million Indians and is familiar to as many more. Based on Sanskrit and Hindi and containing a mass of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish words, it was invented to enable the mixed races which composed the hordes of the early Mongol invaders to speak with each other and to be given orders. The general name for the early conquerors of India, “Great Moguls,” might be written—as the late Sir George Birdwood pointed out—“Mo(n)guls.” *Urdu* is the Sanskrit word for ‘camp’; and, since we are on the etymological tack, I may as well add

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that the word 'Sanskrit' itself comes from *sams-kṛita*—'gathered together.'

Hindustani is, of course, an essential language for appointment to the Indian Army. The *Bagh-o-Bahar*, or *Garden of Spring*, was the text-book I had to study. It consists of five long stories in which most of the characters are eunuchs, fairies, "shameless ones," "beardless lads with flowing curls," or "fairy-born youths." These persons indulge in "liver-burning sighs" and "love-swoons." It seemed to me rather a useless kind of book for the training of a young officer's conversational powers. But it had certain minor compensations; my Hindustani teacher was a practical authority on the subject of the Oriental man's "way with a maid." He was pleasingly informed in other ways too. He told me, for instance, that in almost all Mohammedan books the title gives the date of publication, which is arrived at by adding up the number values of the letters composing it. Thus, *Bagh-o-Bahar*, which is written with eight Arabic letters, equals  $2+1+1000+6+2+5+1+200$ . In other words, it was written in the year 1217 of the Hegira.<sup>1</sup> In this use of letters to represent numbers the Mohammedans resemble the Romans. It used to be the custom for historically important happenings to be commemorated in a pithy sentence, the numerical value of the letters of which gave the date of the happening. For instance, a sentence was invented when Nadir Shah was assassinated, which in Persian ran "*Nadir Shah b'duzakh ruft*" ("Nadir Shah has gone to hell"). These words (in Persian characters) give the date 1161 of the Hegira, that is, A.D. 1747, the year in which Nadir Shah was killed.

<sup>1</sup> The Hegira, or "Flight of Mohammed" commences from July 16, A.D. 622. The date A.D. of the book, allowing for the difference between our calendar's solar years and the Moslem calendar's lunar years, is therefore *circa* A.D. 1800.



## VIII

### *A Farewell to Madras*

In a small glass tank were a cloud of minnows as still as flies in amber, and two small red fish waving their tails. Suddenly the two goldfish sailed among the minnows, which shot away from them like small brown arrows. Rather like mounted policemen scattering a mob, I thought.

I WROTE that trivial account in a diary after visiting the house of a wealthy Indian; and I remember him remarking, when the goldfish scattered the minnows, that they resembled "You British when you came to India." The comparison was, in fact, not so very far-fetched: we are—now, at any rate—avowed disturbers of a simple and ancient peace. And India *is* rather like a big tank in which a few far-sprinkled Britons 'sail among' three hundred and forty million 'brown minnows.' However, I promptly disagreed with my host and said that, far from disturbing the Indians, we kept India from being disturbed. To which he replied disarmingly that he had only been referring to the respective resplendency and dowdiness of the two kinds of fish!

At that period of my life I accepted the natural courtesy and selflessness of such Indians as I happened to meet as being my right. Most Englishmen do. I saw nothing of its grace, and I ignored it as an example. Certainly I took no joy in knowing Indians, as I do to-day. I had not then learned that to know an Indian and to possess his friendship one has first of all to win his sympathy and confidence. It may be a truism; but neglect of what it connotes is upsetting India.

In those days I had a profound respect for the many-volumed *Army Regulations: India*. The *King's Regulations* were the tables of the law; and our social conventions were almost as much to be obeyed as the word of God. I

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would no more have thought of playing tennis with an Indian or of allowing myself to be seen going about with one than I would have walked into the gymkhana club stark naked. I fully agreed, in those days, that an Indian Doctor of Philosophy *should* be referred to as "a nigger" and be kept cooling his heels among the servants when he came to call. I upheld what the Indians call "White monkey" conduct. I was, in fact, a snob of snobs. In one of my diaries of this period stands the following entry:

"... Met a new Englishman at dinner at the Bruntons tonight. He had such unpleasant manners that at first I thought he was in Trade..." If that isn't snobbery I do not know the meaning of the word.

But we were all rather like that. "Divide the sheep from the goats" was our attitude—even to our countrymen. We drew a thick line between Ourselves and Ordinary Civilians. Socially, we were friendly enough in a restrained way; but for *us* the European in trade was a box-wallah—a pedlar. Clerk or millionaire, it made no difference. We ignored the fact that these good people were in reality our paymasters; we accepted their humble toleration as proof that they recognized that they were social *sudras*, or 'low-borns,' and that nothing on God's green earth could ever change the fact. What they thought about us we neither knew nor cared; which was perhaps just as well. Even the 'Heaven-borns,' the Indian Civil Service men—probably the finest body of civil administrators in the world—were not exempt from a somewhat milder form of our disdain. (To think that there was only one of them to every 100,000 of the population!) "If *we* weren't here," we argued, "their jobs would go up in smoke; British India would cease to exist. Therefore they are dependent upon us!" It was all very ridiculous; but, since the state of affairs existed, I mention it.

To-day it astonishes me to recall that I had many good friends in the Indian Civil Service. No doubt they made

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allowances for my youth. One of them—he was on the retired list—lived, ate, and slept in a huge, book-lined room littered with volumes, miniature Pisas of books forming radiating aisles through which one passed to his chair. He suffered from a painful physical ailment about which he made grimly philosophical jokes. “You are in my harem,” he would say, pointing to the books. . . . He it was who braved the proof-sheets of a volume of poems I published before leaving Madras. “You have written something worth writing; perhaps one day you will write something worth reading.” But I think the most chastening truth he taught me was that an author can put nothing into what he writes save that which is in himself and part of himself. “You may be poor enough to have to copy style and ideas, but you can never be rich enough to copy Soul.”

The box-wallahs and the Heaven-borns—any I.C.S. junior could buy and sell a dozen average Army men for brains—used to heap unlighted coals upon our sleek heads by giving us excellent dinners, superlative wines, and a courteous if slightly cynical companionship that kept me thinking long after I had written up my diary and lay sprawled beneath the punkah awaiting sleep.

Soon came examinations: lower standard Hindustani and Persian, and the examination for admission to the Indian Army. I passed all three, because I have always had a certain thoroughness, even in my sins.

Shortly afterwards I was ordered to proceed to Colombo to join the 166th Madras Infantry.

A week's ‘joining leave’ brought the usual trivial dissipations. In those days I used to sing, and at one party given by a rabid anti-Catholic and anti-Irish host and hostess I rendered *Father O’Flynn* with great fervour. My diary records that “I left early.” At another dinner-party happened my one and only experience of what is called “spirit

## *A Farewell to Madras*

writing." My hostess, wife of a Major in the Garrison Artillery, suddenly got up from the card-table, and, going over to a side-table, started to write with her eyes closed.

"Which of you is it for?" she asked laughingly, bringing the paper to us.

'It' purported to be a 'thought-message' from some friends of theirs who lived in a bungalow a couple of miles away, saying they had received orders transferring them to Ceylon and were leaving the next day. At the end of it was the bafflingly irrelevant sentence: "Why have you not wished me 'Many Happy Returns'?" Nobody could make head or tail of it.

I am afraid the 'message' was unanimously voted to be nonsense: the people in question had only just come to Madras, and no one in the room had a birthday that day.

But the friends were transferred, and left by next day's steamer.

I mention the incident because it happened to be Olive's birthday, and I had written a mail late congratulating her and telling her of my coming departure for Ceylon. At the time of the 'thought-message' she could not have received my letter.

Sheroya, the Mirza's devoted young attendant, came to say good-bye to me the day before I sailed. He carried a bunch of pink roses and wore a green velvet coat embroidered with gold lace, and looked rather like an illustration out of an Eastern fairy-tale book. Cocked jauntily on one side of his head was a green-velvet pill-box hat covered with gold sequins. Even his shoes were green, and behind his left ear was stuck a pink rose.

With a charming grace, he drew out a strident silk handkerchief redolent of attar of roses and handed it to me.

"I want you to remember me, sahib!"

I said I would surely remember him, and cut off the attar supply by putting it into my pocket.

## *Indian Mosaic*

Then he produced a small wooden box in which was a live scorpion.

"I keep it to play with," he giggled.

I told him to kill the thing and not be such a fool.

The box was shut. Was I interested in hearing how to catch a blue jay with bird-lime in which is stuck, as bait, a field-mouse?

I said I liked field-mice and disliked blue jays, and started to hand over to him my farewell gifts. These consisted of a screw-top silver pencil which he had more than once admired, and a small magnifying glass that he had deliberately asked for a dozen times. He thanked me profusely, and once more produced the wooden box.

"I will now make the scorpion big," he said, delightedly shaking open the magnifying glass. The thin, dry, scraping sound caused by the clawed palps of that scorpion brushing against the wood of the box made my flesh creep.

The boy was immediately stung, but to my surprise showed no sign of discomfort; yet I have heard a British Tommy groan for the best part of the night after being stung by a scorpion. ("May you be stung by a scorpion of Kashan" used to be a common malediction among Persians, who maintained that whether or not a man feels the effects of a sting depends upon his attitude of mind.)

"The Mirza-sahib," remarked Sheroya casually, "taught me a magic. It is impossible for any scorpion to hurt me!" What that 'magic' was he obstinately declined to say, though I offered to give him my pet mynah if he would tell me.

Scorpions do sometimes kill themselves with their own sting. In camp a big one was surrounded with a ring of fire, and, finding it impossible to escape, deliberately stung itself, and at once died. It may, of course, be suggested that the animal died of fright. Somehow, I cannot associate fright with a scorpion.

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In Mahableshwar I came across a Sikh *sadhu* selling little pieces of black wood which he said were infallible cures for scorpion bites. Jokingly, I said that he would not dare to let himself be bitten and then apply his 'cure.' Would I give him five rupees if he did so? asked the holy man.

Without waiting for my answer, he unrolled the long coils of bleached hair that he had wound in a reddish tower above his head and produced from them three large scorpions. Placing these on the ground, he picked them up one after the other and made them sting him. After he had rubbed the punctures with one of the small pieces of black wood he held out his hand for the five rupees.

On another occasion I saw a poison-proof fakir eat from a teaspoon what purported to be strychnine. The Indian assistant-surgeon who kindly provided the drug swore that it *was* strychnine, and not something resembling it; whereupon some one present offered him five hundred rupees to eat as much of it as would go on a threepenny-bit. The sum (£33) was a large one for a man whose income was probably not more than £100 per year; but he vehemently refused. The fear on his face was not feigned.

One meets astounding instances in India of the control of Mind over Matter—chiefly among the Hindus, many of whose religious mendicants, I believe, use it to perform certain of their wonders, such as lying on a bed of nails, fire-walking, climbing a ladder of razor-edged swords, and so on. Perhaps there is something of the 'tightly-grasped nettle' principle in the doing of these things. What are known as 'occult powers' are latent in every one of us; but a strenuous system of mental discipline is necessary to develop them, a fact that was discovered by the ancient yogis. They are not supernatural powers in the ordinary sense of the word, but *super-normal* powers. A British doctor friend of mine who could not stay long under water was able to hypnotize himself and paralyse his respiratory centre, so that after half an

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hour's self-hypnotism he was able to remain under water for four minutes. When he emerged he was cyanosed—practically drowned, in fact; but he was quite unaware of any discomfort. He had not even heard of the *Keechari mudra* or Sanskrit spell which enables a yogi to do without breathing for long periods. Cases of that kind are common. It is my belief that the time will come when the inestimable value of the basic principles of Yoga will be recognized in the West, and be used in our ordinary daily lives. There are signs of it.

The day of my departure came at last. Glory was boxed at Royapuram siding after kicking senseless my mongrel fox-terrier Sausage, known to all and sundry as Soss. Soss was eaten by a crocodile in a river in the Quilon district. At the moment it happened I was fishing.

Narainswami, who was fond of him, wept. Soss, though a mongrel, was a lovable dog, and when he wanted anything would touch you gently with a paw.

"Perhaps he got to Heaven, sahib," said my servant hopefully. "Mohammedan man say a dog go to Heaven!"

I had not the heart to tell him that the Prophet Mohammed, who abominated dogs but loved his cat, had proclaimed that only one dog—the dog of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus—would be admitted into Heaven. It would seem to be a strangely lonely privilege.

Mohammedans consider dogs unclean animals, and a vessel from which a dog has lapped must be cleansed seven times, the first cleansing being with earth. A Mohammedan bearer told me of a curious belief to the effect that when a dog lies upon its back it knows that a calamity is threatening its master and is begging Allah to avert it.

According to the Hindu faith, all living creatures are our younger brethren, our spiritual ancestors, in fact; and their souls must know reincarnation after reincarnation until they are given a man's form to inhabit. At Benares, in his own

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sacred shrine, stands Bhairava, the watchman-godling who guards all Siva's temples. By his side is his dog. Only into a Bhairava temple may a dog enter. Bhairava's greatest shrine is at Kalinjar, where—if we are to believe that lovable old sycophant Abul-Fazl, Akbar's painstaking historian—many astonishing miracles took place. Perhaps in this instance the unfortunate Abul-Fazl (the peace of God be upon him!) chronicled a truth. In India, most certainly, the age of what we call miracles is not past; it is very much present.

The *Mahabharata*, the greatest of the Hindu epics, records that in 2400 B.C. the hero-prince Yudisthra refused to enter Heaven unless his dog was allowed to enter it with him. A 'pagan' prince wrung that favour from 'pagan' gods!

Surely the loving faithfulness of a dog is dear to a God who is Love? Personally, I believe that if there is no after-life for dogs there is none for us.





## CEYLON



## IX

### *The Land of the Buddha*

I, Buddh, who wept with all my brothers' tears,  
Whose heart was broken by a whole world's woe,  
Laugh and am glad, for there is liberty!  
Ho! ye who suffer! know

Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels,  
None other holds you that ye live and die,  
And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss  
Its spokes of agony,

Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness. . .

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, *The Light of Asia*

CEYLON is not India; but for me it was a link in a chain.

When I joined the 166th Regiment of Madras Infantry it was guarding a Boer Prison Camp, one double company being stationed at Trincomalee, to which place I was subsequently posted. The prison camp lay in a clearing in a snake-infested jungle surrounded with palms and peopled by orange-coloured bats. The situation seemed to me fascinatingly romantic. In those days I had a Robinson Crusoe complex; I wished there had been no railway, and that Colombo was not as near as it was. On the other hand, I was anxious to visit a jeweller's shop and a Buddhist temple; and shortly after my arrival I went in search of them.

The beauty of the island was amazing. Tropical palms, blossoming lianas, and orchids such as one only expects to see in natural history books bordered the red roads. Every growing thing had a curiously soft-looking greenness—'lushness' expresses it more satisfactorily. Everywhere were clumps of gigantic bluish-stemmed bamboos eighty feet or more in height, towering over a sea of fantastically graceful fronds and leaves shot through with emerald fire. The asoka-

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trees wore that hot glory of crimson which caused a Hindu poet to compare them to "a young warrior bathed in the sanguine shower of the battle." Here and there were black-looking lakes that mirrored the surrounding beauty with a faithfulness that inverted Truth. It recalled a transformation scene in an old-fashioned Christmas pantomime, where red, green, and blue tinsel used to be the dominant gorgeousnesses. "But, is it ever Christmas in this tropical Eden? Christmas surely connotes snow," I wrote in a letter home.

Lunched at the Grand Oriental Hotel. The bedrooms have no doors; only small swing flaps about one-third the area of the doorway. Any materialistic heaven that hadn't Sinhalese curry as one of its delights would be badly organized. The native waiters wear white jackets and a coloured linen skirt. They are languid, good-looking men, and wear their long hair twisted into a bun. Into the bun is stuck a tortoise-shell comb. They are extremely cruel and quick to use a knife, which generally happens because of a woman.

So runs a youthful diary. Later reading was to bring to me the knowledge that four centuries ago Ibn Batuta, the Arabian traveller, praised Sinhalese curry.

The jeweller beamed upon me for a tourist delivered into his hands when I said I wanted him to value a precious stone for me. That was actually the object of my visit; for I had come by a Cat's-eye gem, and in the following curious manner. While I was sitting one night on the veranda of a Dak bungalow a furtive-looking Indian materialized out of the shadows and produced a screw of paper containing this stone. He said he had dug it up and would be murdered if I did not buy it. I knew nothing about Cat's-eyes; but, looked at by lamplight, the thing seemed greenishly weird. It never struck me that it might have been stolen. So anxious was he to get rid of it at any price that I somewhat shamefacedly mentioned twenty rupees.

It was a quick deal.

## *The Land of the Buddha*

"What is it worth?" I asked the jeweller as he examined it.

"It is worth, sar, three rupees eight annas!"

Jewellers have that crushing exactness.

I found my Buddhist temple on the bank of a small river a few miles outside Colombo.

While the driver of the *tum-tum* was getting me a guide, I bought for one anna a young coconut. It was knocked from the tuft of the tree by its obliging seller. With three strokes of his heavy hatchet-like knife he then cut off its top, and, slicing off a strip of its green covering, handed the fruit to me that I might drink its cool, refreshing milk. I was then shown how to use the sliver as a knife-cum-spoon with which to cut out and eat the tender grey inner lining that, with age, gets white and hard as we know it in the West. I have tasted few dishes more delicate in flavour than this jelly-like inside coating of a baby coconut.

The gaudily painted exterior of the temple pleased me, for I had not yet fallen under the spell of the great grey temples of India. A shaven-headed old monk, sandalled, and clad in orange robes, met me at the entrance. He could speak Sanskrit, Pali, Singalese, Hindustani, French, German, or English, he said. Which would I prefer? . . . Did I want to be presented to the Abbot? I declined the honour. I could not ask an Abbot whether Buddha died from eating pork, and on that point I was determined to get an authoritative ruling. We had had a vigorous discussion about it at home, my mother being *contra* and my father strongly *pro* pork. Now I was at the fountain-head of knowledge I felt it incumbent upon me to refer the matter—but diplomatically.

I was shown sacred books that were untold centuries old. Each was made up of twenty or thirty palm-leaf strips covered with stylus-engraved Pali writing. Running through a hole bored at their ends were silken cords with terminal knots which kept the painted slat-like covers from becoming

## *Indian Mosaic*

detached and the palm-leaves from being misplaced. When closed these books resembled pulled-up Venetian blinds.

The old monk told his beads as we walked along. A pair of doves cooed softly on a ledge above a big gilt statue which represented the Buddha sitting cross-legged with the backs of his open hands resting in his lap. In the palm of one of those golden hands a sparrow was preening itself.

"What do you monks do all day?"

He looked at me as if the question surprised him.

"We pray; or we read the sacred books or make copies of them; sometimes we tell our beads, as I am doing; and sometimes we go out and beg. Every day we meditate."

"What do you meditate on?"

"Some saying of the Tathágata, the Lord Buddha; such as 'All is changeful, all is sorrowful, all is unreal!' . . . 'Nada! The world is not!' . . . 'Nothingness is the only reality!'"

As a good tourist might do, I asked him to repeat the three sayings, so that I could write them down. He said *Nada* meant 'The Voice of the Voiceless.' I wanted to retort that what is voiceless cannot in any circumstances have a voice; but I thought better of it.

"What are your religious duties?"

"To love mankind is the greatest duty, and therefore the greatest good. Manu has told us that all the world is kin; we are happy in helping those who are our brothers. . . . All the Europeans who come here look anxious and worried. Why is that? One of the sages has said, 'I wept when I was born, and I have been finding out why ever since.' Are they finding out more painfully than we do?"

But pork was uppermost in my mind. "What do you eat?"

"Whatever we may be given. We eat only that we may have strength to worship—not to please our appetites. In the same way, our robes are patched"—he plucked at the skirt of

## *The Land of the Buddha*

his orange-coloured robe and showed me the patches—"to indicate that we wear them to cover our nakedness, not for vanity. When we beg we do not look at those who put food into our begging-bowls, nor do we thank them. It is the giver who thanks us for being allowed to give."

*"Did Buddha die from eating pork?"*

"It is thought that he did so die. The story is a little long; but I shall tell it quickly.

"When the Lord Buddha was eighty years old he was still preaching the scriptures in the villages by the roadside. One day he came, hungry and tired, to a mango grove belonging to a goldsmith named Kunda, who prepared food for him and his followers. Among this food was a dish the Sanskrit name of which means 'soft pigs' food,' and before the cooked things were served the Blessed One said that he would eat of this. His disciples were to have the other foods. Now, it may be that the dish *was* pig's flesh; or it may be that it was made from roots and herbs which a pig eats, and that among them was a poisonous herb or fungus. . . . After they all had eaten the Lord Buddha ordered Kunda the smith to throw away what was left, as it was poisonous. Then a sickness came upon him and blood came from his mouth, and pains like sharp swords hurt him. But, because he never suffered anything to overcome him, he told Ananda his disciple, whose name means 'joy,' that he felt better and would take the road again. As they walked together the Lord Buddha said that Kunda the smith was blessed for having given him the pig dish, for he had given to the Buddha the means of attaining Nirvana, a very great and blessed thing to do. Therefore no man was to think ill of Kunda, whose grief was great.

"Soon a weakness and a great thirst came upon the Tathá-gata, and he bade Ananda fold a robe for him to sit upon. 'Bring me water from the stream, Ananda,' he said. And Ananda, knowing that many laden carts had crossed the



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stream an hour before and fouled it—some say a hundred carts and some five hundred, for an army had marched that way—did not go to fetch the water.

“Three times the Blessed One repeated his request for the water, and at length Ananda went, expecting to find it muddy. But the water of the river was clear. That was, of course, a miracle.

“Then he prepared a bed for the Buddha, setting its head to the north; and the Lord lay down on his right side, with one foot resting upon the other in the position that is called the Lion posture. All Buddhists hope to die in that position.

“Now, though it was not summer, the sal-tree under which he lay, blossomed, and showered its flowers upon him until he was covered with them, and the air was filled with the sounds of heavenly singing and sweet music. Still resting on his right side, the Blessed One then spoke his last words to the Order: ‘*That which causes life also causes decay. . . . Beloved, if you love my memory, love one another!*’”

The monk watched me grind my cigarette into the ground.

“And when Tathágata had said those things,” he continued, “there came a great earthquake, and he passed into the blessedness of Nirvana. . . .”

He paused and was silent a moment.

“That is the story of the Holy One’s death,” he remarked quietly.

“Where did they bury him?”

“They burned his body. When it was done it rained, and the fire was slaked.”

It was so quiet in the temple enclosure that the sound of birds’ wings as they flew seemed disrespectfully loud.

“You have one of his—the Blessed One’s—teeth in your temple at Kandy, haven’t you?”

“We believe so. But the Portuguese looted the temple in which it was kept, and they claim that they burned it publicly

## *The Land of the Buddha*

in their market-place, because, they said, we worshipped it and it was the tooth of a monkey. But we do not worship Hanuman, or any god, and we are told that they themselves worship the bones of their saints. . . . But what does it matter?"

I felt rather glad that the Government I served protected these followers of the Buddha. It seemed a simple and defenceless faith, teaching kindness and truthfulness, so far as I could make out; and such things the world is given to ravishing. I was puzzled when he told me that the Jains—a sect who will not inflict pain on any being created by God—dislike them. Yet their only ceremonial is the daily laying of a few flowers before the statue of Buddha, and an occasional chanting of hymns, while it is their incessant prayer that, like the greatest and gentlest yogi who has ever blessed India with his example, they may feel an immense pity for mankind and so merit Nirvana. I found it strange too to think that—if what he said was true—the first ancestor of our church spire should be the solid cone erected on the top of Buddhist relic-mounds.

A gong sounded, the mellow note shivering into silence.

"May I go? It is time for prayer."

I gave him a rupee, kicking, Briton-wise—and successfully—against a strong desire to ask for his blessing.

He seemed to know what was in my mind.

"The Tathágata also was a *Kshatriya*—a warrior," he said, and shuffled away.

That night I danced, and went to bed at two in the morning.



## TRICHINOPOLY



## X

### *The Great Perhaps*

Are we a piece of machinery that, like the Æolian harp,  
passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do  
these workings argue something within us above the trodden  
clod?

ROBERT BURNS (*in a letter*)

BEFORE the end of the year the regiment was moved to Trichinopoly—in Tamil *Tirusapalli*, “The Land of the Three-headed Demon”—where the roads are red and shaded, and everywhere there are pipal-trees and temples.

I know nothing to equal the grandeur of the Hindu temples. The impression made upon me by the first one I saw, more than thirty years ago, remains vivid and unchanged. It was from my memories of those great shrines that many years later I drew the temples described in *King Cobra* and *The Poisoned Mountain*; yet I but took the topmost coins of a heap of gathered treasure that will be mine until I write no more, and perhaps for ever. India’s temples taught me much. Hoary monuments of a faith that is as alive to-day as it was thousands of years ago and which underlies half the faiths of the world, the great temples represent the real soul of Hindu India. . . . All true art is ultimately based upon religion and—dare I say it?—upon truth. . . . Surrounded by their carven majesty, I sensed in them a certain live sinister-ness; as if some hideous monster lay hidden in their inner darknesses. Young as I was, I sensed it; not so much as a ruling power of Evil, but rather as the dread guardian of Something I could not grasp, yet which some atavistic instinct told me I had once known. The first time I walked down one of the seven-hundred-foot corridors of Rameshvaram temple a nautch-girl passed me like a bright red flame,

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and in her passing lit some taper in my mind. But the Wind of Things blew it out again. . . .

In Kumbakonam I saw half a million Hindus gathered for the *mela*, or religious festival, that is held every fourteen years to celebrate the flowing of the sacred waters of the Ganges into the temple's great central tank. In India 'tank' means a small lake.

The town was *en fête*, and the streets almost impassable. It was strange to see in India a fair that had most of the attractions of an English one. Swings, discordant steam roundabouts, scent-squirts and squeakers, tinsel ornaments and acrobats—all were there. One acrobat, a tiny naked figure high above the heads of the crowd, balancing on the tips of two horns strapped vertically to the soles of his feet, danced on a slack rope. . . . Perhaps one day an Indian Chaucer will give to the world an Indian equivalent of the *Canterbury Tales*. . . .

Somebody—I forget who—has compared life to a rope stretched between this world and eternity, and man's mind to an acrobat trying desperately to keep his balance on it. Something like that was happening in the fair. Under the shallow surface current of amusement ran a mighty undertow of religion. Every man, woman, and child bore a sacred symbol on their foreheads; there were booths where one could buy little statues of the gods and goddesses; Religion, in the shape of handsome dignified Brahmins, stalked through the respectfully saluting throng; Religion spoke in the gongs and conches that blared from the near-by temple insistent reminders that the stream of life cannot flow placidly unless a sleeping deity be awakened and asked so to ordain it. In their hundreds, weighed down with humbleness, they entered, bowing their paint-streaked foreheads and placing their offerings before the kneeling stone *Nandi* bull, or in the supple hands of its priests; and while they watched the temple elephants scrunch the sugar-cane they had brought

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for them, Religion proclaimed that It and Life are inseparable. Religion had sent her emaciated servants, many of them horribly crippled fanatics, to sit naked in the dust and tell them so. Religion had made the cripples among those grim spiritual sentinels hold skinny arms to high Heaven until the joints had become ankylosed and would never be able to be moved again, and the nails grew through the flesh and tendons of the clenched hands and projected at the back like curved hooks. . . . Earth is sometimes forced into the tunnels of those fixedly curved fingers, and a plant grown in it, the roots dangling like brown and yellow threads through the interstices of the shrivelled digits, and hanging down in bunches at the farther side of the moveless hands. . . . Many years later I found my shocked views of these fanatics embodied in a verse from the *Bhagavad-Gita* (*The Song of the Blessed Lord*):

Those who torture their bodies with grim mortifications . . .  
are unjust to Me who dwell in them, and are of demonic convictions. . . .

Yet his religion is the Hindu's one reality. The day that he loses his faith in it we shall lose India; and already there are signs of coming spiritual disintegration. . . .

Rather strangely, perhaps, at that period of my present existence, nothing of all this made the slightest impression upon me. I did not even regard Indians as being corporeal entities. I looked only at their eyes. In a sense, their features did not exist. They were there, yes, but merely as a kind of general impression—not as evidences of distinct and visible personalities. That crowd—and all India, for that matter—had no more actual effect on me as a thing present than water has on a fish that swims through it.

I have evolved the explanatory theory that, unknown to me, my mind was provided with an effective 'cut-out,' and was making contact—or seeking contact—only with those



## Indian Mosaic

minds to which it could 'tune-in.' It is a weak theory, maybe, for the cause may equally well have been that I was too self-centred or too absorbed in my work—which I loved, though it worried me—or too anxious about the health of somebody in Switzerland for anything else to seem of the slightest importance.

Some years later I mentioned this freakish behaviour of my mind to my guru, or spiritual teacher. "You realized that everything is *maya*—illusion; that was the reason," he said. So, because I have never known him to be wrong, and because Olive told me that she had a similar feeling when she met people (her letters had now a disquieting gravity) I am unable to reject, entirely, my explanatory theory. In one letter she wrote:

Everybody is so sweet to me, and I am so grateful to them. If the roots of a plant could think—and perhaps they can—I imagine they would feel towards the sun and the earth just what I feel towards Granddaddy and these other kind souls. I want you to feel the same towards India: that you are sending roots deep into her and that she is nourishing them. I want you to be grateful to My Mother.

As I saw the situation, India had nothing in her to nourish any roots I might send into her, and I was extremely glad of the fact. The reiteration of the "Mother" motif was just—Olive, of course. The following extract from my diary sums up my reaction to that letter:

O. says that I'm taking root in India. God forbid! I don't belong to the country, and, like John Nicholson, I often wish I were out of it and back in England. Yet one thing I can see in what she says: The growth and beauty of a flower depend upon its dark-hidden mother roots—unthanked things, even with gardeners. Perhaps one day some one will study the beauty of Roots. Maybe they have some sense of natural altruism, for they do seem to give All and get nothing in return. Or is it a case of 'the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, growing up through the common'? Or do they share everything?

## XI

### *Black Magic*

I have ever believed, and do now avow, that there are witches.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *Religio Medici*

ONCE a year we had a month's double-company field-training.

My double-company commander was a hot-tempered man with a craze for field-days, and in a torrid and steamy climate these things can be trying. But he believed in trying people, and for the good of my soul saw to it that I spent many, many days on the rifle-range. It was my pet abomination . . . the clammy heat, the sharp cracking of the rifles far away from the butts, the idiot waving of marking disks, the stomachic rumble of the target trolleys . . . The number of route marches that man managed to cram into a month's training appalled me as much as it amused the subalterns in other double companies, while the fertility of his brain in thinking out new field firing stunts was positively amazing. On one occasion he bought three hundred *chattus*—round earthenware water-pots as big as footballs—to represent "enemies' heads." I and my senior Indian officer were, he said, to have them "realistically *in situ*" all over French Rock by sunset the next day. French Rock, by the way, was a low hill which he intended the double company should attack the following dawn, using ball-cartridge. It was a good idea, for the men would have something more realistic to shoot at than the usual small paper targets. But it happened that I had invited the prettiest of the gaol superintendent's daughters to go riding with me on the afternoon on which I had been ordered to "put the enemy into position." Somehow, therefore, both things had got to be managed.

## Indian Mosaic

My senior Indian officer was an extremely stout Madrassi gentleman named Subramaniya Pillay. It was a very inappropriate name for him, meaning as it does "Son of the War God," for he was gentle and easy-going and from the bottom of his heart hated field-days. After an hour's drill he looked as if he had been soused in a river. Many a time I had heard him groan aloud in anguish of body and spirit while balancing himself upon his belly when ordered to crawl to the attack.

In Subramaniya lay the key to the *chatti* situation.

I sent for him.

"To put three hundred *chattis* in position during the day-time, Subadar sahib, will be extremely hot work. Why should we not do it to-night, instead of to-morrow afternoon?"

He said it was *rumbo, rumbo, nelideh* (a very, very excellent idea).

Madras has at times a super hothouse climate, and that field-day was so hot and steamy that my double-company commander cracked several jokes. In consequence, with the merciful exaltation of the doomed, I felt that I really rather liked field-days.

The sun rose, and French Rock loomed up before us.

Hearing Subramaniya Pillay groan more loudly than usual, I turned to look at him. A messenger was doubling in my direction crouchingly. But it was not an order to crawl to the attack. I had been sent for.

The D.C.C. was not genial. He said he could not see any *chattis*.

I stood to attention and said nothing. It seemed suddenly to have become cooler.

Handing me his field-glasses he asked me if I could see any *chattis*.

I looked long and earnestly. No, I could not. One can hardly say he sees what isn't there, when the next minute he

## *Black Magic*

might be asked to describe what it was that he saw. There was not a sign of one *chatti*, let alone of three hundred.

Fortunately, we had an ace of a colonel—a tall, red-faced, good-humoured man with splay feet who always wore his helmet tilted well to one side. He rode up at that moment. But *he* didn't look genial, and I began to wonder how one worded one's resignation.

"The Collector doesn't wish ball-cartridge to be used," he said.

So we ended up with a bayonet charge.

The unguarded *chattis* had been removed by the villagers during the previous day. Doubtless the poor souls thought that some kindly godling had put them there for them to find, and it would not have surprised me if they had built a shrine to a *chattu* god. Not so very far from there a shrine was once actually built over an anthill inside which two small boys had sworn they had heard trumpets being blown by a god. The astute local Brahmins made hay while the sun shone on a sudden influx of devout pilgrims.

It was from Subramaniya Pillay that I learned most of the little I know about the goddess Kali, who is worshipped in Bengal. It is the Hindu belief that the present age is the *Kali yuga*—or Iron Age of Destruction—which will last for 432,000 years, of which about 5000 years have passed. *Kali* is the name given to the one-spot on dice; so that the age we live in is the least desirable of all the ages! I wonder.

Only a Hindu could really know what the Kali of Bengal stands for, Subramaniya explained. Madras has Mariamma, the dread goddess of smallpox, and several other bloodthirsty goddesses. But they are not forms of Kali: Kali is them; for they were worshipped by the Dravidian South untold ages before She of Bengal was invented. (Subramaniya thought that the word 'cholera' was derived from *kali*). "In the sacrificial ceremonies held in their honour," he said, "the European sees only externals." However that may be,

## Indian Mosaic

they are revolting externals. I have particularly in mind the rites performed in honour of the smallpox Mariamma and the buffalo sacrifice offered to Ganta-Amma—"She who comes with Bells." I might here remark that, although the cow looms large in orthodox Hinduism, in reality she is a bovine *parvenue* compared to the buffalo of South India, which was sacred to the gods long before the Aryan Brahmin invaders sanctified the cow, whose protection was naturally of vital importance to a nomad people. Still, there is something strangely lovable about a cow; she is so gentle and gives so much.

Kali is sometimes pictured dancing in a burial-ground with the infant Siva in her arms, a grim figure surrounded by prancing demons; and in that form is the goddess of cholera. Vishnu is said to have cut her body into fifty-two pieces and scattered them over the world, one of her fingers falling at Kalighat—the landing-place of Kali—in Calcutta, to-day the site of what is probably the most famous of her countless temples. *Ghat* means 'landing-place' or a 'way,' and there are those who maintain that the Scottish word 'gate' used in this sense (as in 'the Canongate') is derived from the Sanskrit. . . . There seems little doubt but that formerly human sacrifices were offered to Kali, for the *Kali-Purana* has a passage which reads as follows:

The flesh of the antelope and the rhinoceros give my Beloved delight for 500 years. By a human sacrifice in the prescribed form the Devi (goddess) is pleased for 1000 years; and by a sacrifice of three men for 100,000 years.

A *sunnyasi*<sup>1</sup> who used to live under a pipal-tree outside a Kali temple told me that he had often heard the tapping of the hoofs of the spirits of goats that had come there to be slain! (Even to me the rustling of leaves is a mysterious sound.)

<sup>1</sup> From the Sanskrit *nyasa*, 'to renounce' a Hindu who has renounced the world.

## *Black Magic*

He disapproved of blood sacrifices, and, shaking his matted head deprecatingly, muttered over his beads. Siva, the Great Ascetic—the only white-skinned god in the Hindu pantheon and who lived so long ago that his birth-date, alone of all the gods, is not recorded in the Vedas—gave India the rosary.

Reflecting upon the self-torture of certain medieval Christian fanatics, I wondered whether Buddhism ever produced a debased fanatic. To-day I know that Buddhism in its purest form—Tibetan Buddhism is a cult apart—could not produce a debased anything. Philosophic Hinduism is utterly different from ritual Hinduism and its sexual complexities—so different, in fact, as to be in some respects its opponent.

In India a man's caste<sup>1</sup> rules out certain occupations in life. The problem of a career for his sons never troubles the orthodox Hindu, for there is no question of choice. The Indian is born into a trade-guild to which his forefathers from remotest time have one and all belonged. As soon as he can toddle a man-child begins to help his father—or his nearest male relative if his father be dead—in the trade of his caste. I once saw a potter's small son trying very hard to make something out of an intractable lump of wet clay. From time to time his father, who was moulding water-pots, glanced at him uninterestedly. Time after time the child tried, and time after time he failed. Finally, he shamefacedly confessed defeat.

"Make a flower, then," said his father, without stopping the heavy wheel he was spinning.

At once, and with an astonishing deftness, that untaught child made a lotus.

In "Trichy," as we affectionately called it, all the night-

<sup>1</sup> From the Portuguese *casta*, a 'breed' or 'class'. I believe there is no mention of caste in the Vedic hymns. Caste came in with the Brahmins, who recognized a colour-bar. There are nearly two thousand subdivisions in the main castes or classes in India.

## *Indian Mosaic*

watchmen, or *chowkidars*, were thieves by caste. None of us were ever robbed, but Narainswami said that my old fellow used to sit in the dark and practise black magic. This I refused to believe until one morning he brought in to show me the body of a rat decorated with strings of worsted and a bit of red cloth. The old man was a worshipper of the bad Ganesh—the left-handed form of the benevolent and lucky Ganesh, the elephant-headed Remover of Obstacles and Lord of the Five Orifices, to whom every Hindu villager prays when he goes out into the fields at break of day.

Black Magic is a highly organized institution in South India, and there are a score or more of various arts of magic dealing with spells and charms—things that are in general malignant, such as invocations for the destruction of an enemy, and so on.

I was not discontent to hear from a Hindu medical man that many of these debased devotees die mad or diseased; the curses they have sent out against others come home to roost.

## XII

### *Fanaticism*

Murder most foul, as in the best it is;  
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*

IN Trichinopoly day-long rides on Sundays were my favourite form of exercise. A filled sandwich-case and a canvas nose-bag containing a feed of oats for Glory, and all South India was ours to ride over. . . .

Field after field of dark, close-growing pulse, with here and there crops of broad-leaved maize and millet. The stalks snap and crackle under the pony's dancing hoofs. He breaks into a springy canter. He is making for a patch of *jowari* to show me that he knows where, with any luck, we may put up a jackal. We often share our thoughts. . . . I pass a caressing hand down the sharp bristles of his hogged mane, and get a fleck of warm foam thrown on to my face like a blown kiss.

We have drawn blank.

No, we haven't! A small, greyish-yellow form, very like a fox, glides across an open patch ahead of us. Come *up*, Glory!

The wind blows hotly in my face. Women—debts—duties—are there such things? . . . This jack is going to give us a run for our money! But the black-cotton soil is dangerously full of cracks, and the pony isn't too clever. . . . Hup! . . . That was a sudden swerve. If I'd been looking at the going, instead of at the jack, we'd have jumped that disused well, even though there is a nasty-looking bit of wall on the farther side of it. . . . A grunting, squealing herd of narrow-flanked pigs scuttle out of a maize crop.



## *Indian Mosaic*

The next second the sunbaked earth rushes up to meet my face in a swift-moving streak of *jowari* stalks and curled mud-flakes.

Glory has turned a superb somersault.

He gets up and shakes himself with a hollow rattle of gear, making the dust fly and the stirrup irons shiver and swing foolishly. Then, with ears pricked he glances round at me, heaves an immense sigh that ends in "*Prrrf!*" and noses round for grass. If only we could forget *our* troubles as easily! In the distance I hear the discordant creaking of an irrigation water-wheel. It had been screeching just as discordantly before, but the spindle-shanked cultivator has stopped his bullocks to watch the fun. My shoulder hurts abominably as I bend to feel the Arab's slim forelegs and clean, taut tendons.

No damage!

Glory bumps the back of my head with his nose, impatient to be away again; but I decide, a trifle dizzily, that jackals are 'off.' We shall make, and sedately at that, for a grove of mango-trees half a mile away. I need shade for my head and water for my chin.

The usual chorus of half-barks, half-howls from jackal-crossed pariah-dogs greets us as we draw near the village. But their clamour dissolves into a woman's long-drawn scream.

We curse the shoulder and break into a trot.

A woman is being murdered; and it is being done elaborately. A crowd of men and women are looking on. They are standing round her in 'closed lane' formation, the open space in the middle being some thirty yards long. Looking over their heads, I see the girl lying at one end of the lane, her face turned in my direction. Blood is flowing from her nose and mouth, and there is a small pool of it under her cheek.

What is to be done?

## *Fanaticism*

If it is a religious ceremony—nothing! Government orders forbid interference with native religious ceremonies.

I decide to watch for a moment or two, and, if I can, make sure. I do not have to wait long. A big, naked fanatic detaches himself from a group at one end of the closed lane, takes a swift run at the prone girl, leaps high into the air just before he reaches her, and, bringing his feet together, lands full in the small of her back.

This time she screams more faintly.

Glory doesn't like it.

Neither do I, by God! I touch him with the spur, and he sidles at the nearest wall of the crowd, which breaks and lets us in.

The *sadhu*-murderer is walking back like a bowler getting ready to bowl again. But we are in the middle of the pitch now, straddling it.

"Stop!" I stand up in my stirrups as if I were fool enough to be looking for a policeman. My voice cracks, and the vowel sound explodes, so to speak. In consequence I am nearly pitched over Glory's head. He hates sudden noises.

The crowd regard me sourly; but nobody answers or moves. The girl moans a short sentence in Tamil which I would give five—fifty—pounds to be able to understand.

"She has a devil," calls out somebody. "The Holy One is driving it out of her! Let be!"

I simmer, but decide to "slake the fire of zeal with the ashes of discretion," as the old Mirza used to say. "An officer interfering with a religious ceremony is liable to trial by general court-martial——" That is the condensed wording of the official order.

But, hell!

"I am an officer of the *Sirkar* [Government]! Fetch your headman! At once!"

Perhaps it was just as well that the gods decided to deal with that devil themselves. Or if they didn't, then some-

## *Indian Mosaic*

thing else inexplicable happened, for, waving his arms and shouting hoarse words at Glory and me, the *sadhu* stalked away.

The villagers, I heard, repudiated the action of those present at the exorcism, and reported that "this insane girl's death was due to dysentery."

But horses don't have dysentery.

That night Glory had something very like dysentery, and I nearly lost him.

Shortly after that I started to learn Tamil, but somehow I could not take to the language, and I spent the greater part of my teacher's daily hour asking questions about black magic and religious customs. He knew little about the first, but quite a lot about the second. I still have the notes I made, which range from natural history and folk-lore to sexual abominations. For instance: "A mongoose eats white ants." (I got one the next day.) "The white convolvulus is a transformed girl; if the right lover kissed its petals it would become a girl again." "The bloodstained rags I've seen fluttering over the village byres are to keep demons away." "A blue jay seen when starting a journey is a bad omen; its chopped-up feathers given to a cow will increase her milk." "There is a sect of Bombay Vishnavites who, when they pray, insist that their wives shall be stark naked."

Things like that.

One note is about the origin of the word 'pariah': "Comes from the Tamil word *purriyar*, 'a drum-beater.' In ancient times the village slaves had to beat a drum whenever robbers were known to be near."

My Tamil teacher was a middle-aged ex-clerk of the Southern Railway. For some reason he called every European he met 'Gentleman.' One day, piqued at my criticism of the custom of animal sacrifices, he defended it energetically and ingeniously. Here is the gist of what he said:

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“Almost every religion has believed that the pleasing of a god connotes the shedding of blood. The faiths of the Jews, Babylonians, Druids, Christians, and many others at one time or another taught the efficacy of a blood-offering. . . . Now, Gentleman, even if we Hindus do sacrifice a thousand, or even five thousand, goats a year in the Kalighat temple in Calcutta, did not King Solomon at the dedication of his temple sacrifice twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep? Sir, most literally you cannot throw stones at us!” In one of his last letters to me the old fellow referred to that conversation:

“You think we belong in the Dark Ages because we offer up victims with violence, even though we do so mercifully. But, I ask you, sir, *What does a Flanders poppy stand for?*”

I once saw part of a sacrifice to propitiate Mariamma the cholera goddess, who at that time was concerning herself with my part of the world. The victim was a lumbering water-buffalo, whose almost hairless, slaty skin was yellow with turmeric.

The thing might have happened in Babylon or Greece.

In front of the massive knock-kneed animal, which seemed all angles save for its immense barrel-like ribs, walked two *purriyars*, thudding and hammering their drums as if their lives depended upon the amount of noise they got out of them. Behind them marched an excited crowd of villagers, dancing and howling exhortations to the dread goddess to go away. Many of them were drunk; but that is neither here nor there. I have known a senior officer deliberately get drunk when cholera broke out in a camp.

The decapitation was bungled and messy. Then the right foreleg was hacked off and placed in the mouth—a procedure that was never explained to me. . . .

Indeed and indeed, the soil of Southern India is red; but it nourishes, generously, a simple and lovable people.

Externals are not everything.

## XIII

### *A Trichinopoly Idyll*

And the glory of the Garden, it shall never pass away<sup>1</sup>

RUDYARD KIPLING, *The Glory of the Garden*

**I**N the crude mosaic of my life there is one small corner that is perfect because it is somebody else's work. The design takes the form of a lady in a garden, standing in the splendour of an early morning sun.

Until my friendship with the Lady of the Flowers came about I had regarded Gardens as being pleasant places prepared by an aged and illiterate male class for others to walk in. I had the average young man's love of the commoner blooms; they looked pretty and smelt nice. But, as a newly pupped soldier, any affection for flowers, or any unpaid-for devotion to their production and arrangement, I looked upon as a repulsive effeminacy. It was an unconscious pose, I think, induced by a subconscious desire to keep hidden a hypersensitive nature. Youth is far better at posing than middle age.

To-day it is my conviction that the habit that She implanted in me of making a garden in every station to which I was posted saved me more than once from moral shipwreck.

We met for the first time in an Indian garden when level shafts of quivering gold bridged the misty gaps between the mango-trees and half the world was still asleep. Glory and I had splashed our way through the grey mist that was smoking up from the rice-fields, trying vainly to race the first flocks of green parakeets who were on their way to the mango groves. Jumping a stream, the Arab cantered bendingly between the tree-trunks, snorting rhythmically, as horses will in the cool of the morning. The air, I remember,

## *A Trichinopoly Idyll*

was heavy with the scent of the yellowish-white blossoms that made the mango-trees resemble great candelabras set ready for the sun to light. In South India many big gardens merge into a mango grove; and, rounding a bend, we suddenly came upon Her cutting flowers.

Looking back in memory at the pair of us that day, I see the gulf of our difference: She, serene, gentle, and ethereal; I, confused, selfish, and in vague disagreement with Life.

My apologies were accepted. A wizened, bow-legged Tamil rose, gnome-like, from out a sea of green stalks, and I slid groundward, giving him the reins.

"Do you like gardening?" Her first question.

"I think flowers are wonderfully patient." My first reply.

The gnome with the bowed legs was watching me so doubtfully that I laughed.

"Has something I have said amused you?"

"No. It's your gardener. His legs, I mean."

"Tumboo is a wonderful old man. He taught me all I know about Indian gardening. . . . There are no flowers in your Mess compound. You're Mess Secretary; you should grow some!" Thoughtful grey eyes considered her scissors. "Always have flowers—if only a few! . . . Would you like me to lend you Tumboo, one day a week? . . ."

Glory came to like trespassing when the dewdrops still glistened on the spider-webs and the golden orioles were calling sleepily. It was in those hours that, as a child of the high hills might teach some blundering townsman to set his feet with confidence, the Garden Lady taught me to surmount unworthy things; and, moving always upward and high above me, counselled me as I climbed.

One morning I found her and Tumboo—for whom she was a composite deity made of every flower he knew—jubilant. Together they had been able to induce a certain kind of cosmos daisy to conquer its fears of some unsuitability in the soil and throw a forest of white hands to the

## *Indian Mosaic*

sun. . . . “*A forest of white hands*”—that was her expression. Looking down at the half-curved petals, I seemed to see a resemblance between them and the fingers of a child that had once salaamed to me in the Madras bazaar. A desire to please had overcome timidity.

I mentioned the incident.

“The child looked upon you as a ruler; as one sent by his gods. That view of us is the real ‘White Man’s burden,’ of course.”

“Its mother did not seem to think that way!”

“To look admiringly at a child attracts the notice of demons who will steal away its soul!”

“Don’t you hate superstition?” I watched Glory dribble as he ate a bit of sugar-cane.

“Of course I do. But in this case maybe the root idea is that attention engenders pride, and pride steals the simplicity that is good. . . . Did you know that if they lose a child by disease they call the next baby by a repellent name?”

“Hindus are riddled with superstition! I’m quite sure your gardener believes in elementals!”

“I rather think *I* do! . . . You know, Eldy,<sup>1</sup> *simplicity* means so much to them! I think that is a rather comforting survival in these times. We’re far too complicated.”

Often, while long-stalked flowers were being cut and laid a-tilt in the basket on her arm, we talked of books and music, subjects of conversation that were not favoured—or were but seldom mentioned—in the Indian military circles of those days. But most of all she liked to talk about India, especially about its peoples. I remember her saying when Tumboo’s wife died, “It’s a great pity that we English people know so little about Indian women. They’re such loyal and devoted creatures. Curiously pure.” She reddened, I remember, and asked me whether I was getting to like Trichinopoly.

I said I was getting to love it.

<sup>1</sup> Her nickname for me, an abbreviation of “elder brother.”

## *A Trichinopoly Idyll*

How often and how sorely I must have tried her patience! I can remember, in one half-hour, discussing with her: whether I should ask to be transferred to another double company; whether I should apply for the Military Accounts Department, or the Supply and Transport Corps. . . . "And what *is* one to do with a servant who gives a pet mongoose food that makes it sick?"

When I left Madras her friendship followed me in letter-form.

It is very sad that you have been ill; but it's nice, isn't it? to get in a backwater occasionally and read and forget the mad world. Everybody is so busy bothering about things that don't in the least matter. . . .

I am sending you, at last, the Keats' Letters. The notes are unforgivable; so you must shut your eyes tight when you come to the end of each page. . . . But try to love poor Fanny Brawne a little—every one is so down on her. I am sure she loved Keats; but she was so young! How could a child of eighteen know? She must have suffered terribly afterwards. Her education and that little coterie must have been so much against her. Yes, you must love poor Fanny Brawne a little. . . .

I had railed against the caste system, and she wrote:

They have Caste, we have Class. In some ways our system is the crueller. . . . Certainly I pity the pariahs. Especially their children. But their uplifting must be done slowly. There must be in it Hindu ethics as well as English economics; spiritual anchorage as well as social freedom. A good Brahmin would be the best 'missionary.' Our good people have too much sense of 'superiority,' and don't realize that they are themselves only half-Christians. . . . The Roman Catholic priest's spirit of self-sacrifice appeals to the Hindu, who admires the divine love and the self-sacrifice of Christ. The two things are synonymous, of course. . . .

From another letter:

I am not quite 'there' with your remark about Shelley's Prometheus and Æschylus, so directly I get back I will read both and think it out. There are only grand editions over



## Indian Mosaic

here. . . You are fortunate too in your friends. I am never so convinced of the good that my few friends give me in loving me—perhaps because I am such a miserable creature in never being sure of them—but I do know that in loving them I am the happier person.

To live in the love that floweth forth  
Than in the love that cometh in. . .

Can you see this? It is all so strange, this Life, and so unnecessarily complex. We have to get mixed up with so much error. The only way to get away from it all is to realize Love in all our doings. I fail so often, I am ashamed to talk; but you are so much stronger. You will master 'the great task of happiness.' I know it.

Do not talk of having no one with you again.

For several years we neither met nor corresponded because of a certain glamorous episode that, with me, passed for Love. Then, when we were both home on leave, I asked her to meet me at a certain smart Piccadilly restaurant.

She who gave little thought to clothes and the smaller vanities, and would have preferred the quietness of a club or even a teashop, came dressed in a home-made costume that reproached mournfully a new frock-coat and 'topper.'

Over the champagne—she but sipped hers, and then asked for water—I talked social stupidities; said things I knew she disliked; told her amusedly that I intended to marry a girl of whom I knew she would disapprove. "But she's smart. And she hasn't too much poetry in her. . . ."

Across the years the horror or it stares at me Medusa-wise. . . . The Lady of the Flowers, I know now, was one of those who believe that salvation is to be attained through selfless love and devotion, as the *Bhakti-yoginis* believe. But how should I, who shivered lonely among the high peaks of her mind, have known then such things as those?

To-day thickening shadows make the climbing difficult—I suppose because I am a little tired and the steeps between me and any worth-while achievement are so unscalable.

## *A Trichinopoly Idyll*

Sometimes, with the sickening vertigo of age, I look towards where I know lies the one perfect corner in my crude mosaic. Each time I expect to discern it more faintly; but there is upon it always a steady brightness—those rays of quivering gold which once I saw coming through the mango-trees at early morning. And, though the tiniest fragment in the design is clearly visible and her grace unchanged, no comfort comes to me from the sight of it all. Instead, my thoughts ‘panic,’ and form themselves into a halting *De profundis*. . . .

There was always a sort of . . . holiness . . . about her.



BANGALORE



## XIV

### *Bangalore Brings the Uncanny*

All argument is against it, but all belief is for it.

*BOSWELL'S Life of Samuel Johnson*

THE passing of two years found my outlook on India unchanged. The country still did not interest me much, and of the 'weird mystery' so often mentioned by Olive's grandfather I had seen nothing; the 'mysterious East' business was clearly a myth. If, therefore, I was impatient to see more of India, it was not because I liked either the country or the people, but because I felt that a change of scene would relieve the monotony. I was, in fact, dissatisfied; an officer of a Madras infantry regiment stood little, if any, chance of ever seeing active service. The Supply and Transport Corps, on the other hand, had just sent a detachment to China.

I would apply for the Supply and Transport Corps.

"Think well over it before you decide to leave us for good," wrote my Colonel. When I received his letter I did my best to think things out, but I only brought on symptomatic itchings of a desire to take Home leave. Olive's health was worrying me, and the pay I was drawing was far too small for us to marry on. So I bludgeoned into insensibility all regrets for a refused adjutancy of the 166th by reminding myself that John Nicholson, the Mutiny hero, had found the Commissariat Department a way to greater things, and applied for the Supply and Transport Corps.

In due course I found myself posted to Bangalore as an "S. and T. Officer, Vith Class. On probation."

It felt strange, at first, having no regimental duties and no regimental Mess. But then, all my life I had harboured an exasperating feeling of loneliness, as if some one I wanted

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to be with were on the other side of a wall which I could not climb. Olive used to take me to task about it.

You ought not to feel as lonely as you say you do. . . . I believe that one always has in one's life, and about one, just the persons who are necessary to the development of one's soul. You would say, of course, that that part of us cannot be 'developed.' I think I mean 'un-enveloped.' (Is there such a word?) What I really want to say is that there are 'rinds' that shut in one's soul and which have to be peeled off; and we are afraid to do it ourselves. Do you remember marking for me Robert Browning's lines?

I count life just a stuff  
To try the soul's strength on

When I am not with you I am quite sure that some one else whose influence is just what is needed for your good is filling my place for me. . . . I miss you . . . as a garden misses the sun; but I suppose even flowers must sleep!

For the first week I stayed with the manager of the Bank of Southern India, who was the lucky possessor of a bath in which one could lie at full length. After two years of zinc tubs which buckled noisily when one got into their three inches of hot water a bath like that was a sensual indulgence! Incidentally, my bedroom was the room formerly occupied by his invalid father, who had left Bangalore to live in Kody, a Madras hill-station.

One big function at the British Residency I shall never forget, mainly because of what happened after it. It was a more than usually brilliant show, several great Indian potentates and their suites in full gala attire being among the guests. The music of an excellent string band; the scarlet uniforms and the gold lace; the varied types of gorgeousness; the sparkling of orders; the shimmering of satins; the diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds—these things did much to make less tedious the State Banquet and the starchy State Ball that followed. But I was glad to get back to the

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bungalow, and was soon fast asleep. The cool air of the Mysore plateau made one sleep well.

I was awakened by a strong feeling that there was somebody in the room. And I knew who it was—my host.

“What’s the matter?” I asked. I was so certain that it was he that I did not bother to open my eyes.

There was no answer.

Again I said, “What’s the matter?” And again I got no answer. I lay there a moment, my eyes closed and my brain fighting against sleep and a queer sensation that this somebody was almost touching me.

Then I opened my eyes. . . . Yes, it was my host. Dimly seen and tired-looking, he was bending over me, and appeared to be smiling, for I could see a gleam of teeth. But his hands were crossed upon his breast, and that made the smile look uncanny. (“Keep clear of the uncanny!”) My heart began to thump. There was no light in the room; the night was moonless; and yet I could see him!

A second later I realized something that made my skin prickle: half of this man’s body was *outside* the mosquito curtains, and half of it was *inside* them.

Even as I raised myself, very slowly the face and the form faded—became a dim blur—vanished. I pushed open the taut gauze curtains and struck a light. Three A.M.

I sat up until dawn, and then called to Narainswami to bring me a cup of tea.

That morning at breakfast my friend looked so terribly depressed that I asked him whether he had had any bad news.

“My father died at three o’clock this morning.”

It was in Bangalore that I made my first real Indian friend—Sheikh Ahmed, an officer of the Military Accounts Department. It was very pleasant to hear and to return his dignified “*Salaam Aliekūm*” each time we met. When I argued



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with him some question of accounts—nearly always wrongly—he would stroke his carefully kept black beard with a grave smile and let silence be his final argument. They were devastating silences. He was a Sufi, and also my patient instructor during the three months' course of Military Accounts I had to attend.

The Sufis are a sect of Mohammedan mystics who believe in the identification of God in man, and teach personal union with Him through the annihilation of the Ego. In this, and in many other ways, there is in the Sufi doctrines a marked influence of Hindu philosophy. Islam recognized the cult nearly nine centuries ago, but its members do not keep all the precepts of the Prophet; for instance, a Sufi will drink wine, and he believes music and dancing—even as King David did—to be helpful to devotional ecstasy.

I happened to have been reading Sir Richard Burton's *Pilgrimage to Mecca and Al Medina*, and I asked Sheikh Ahmed why it was that Moslems and Hindus refused to admit to their places of worship persons of another faith.

"I belong to a sect which is against all such tolerance," he said; and mentioned the Sufis.

Not being interested, I persisted in my questions about Mecca.

"Is it true that the water of Zem-Zem, the holy spring, is sewage?"

"It may have *become* foul. . . . I am making a new index for Volume III of the *Army Regulations: India*. It is much needed." The beard was stroked, and one of the annihilating silences followed.

It was typical of me.

On another occasion the Sufi topic came up again. I had made a heated remark about the offensive attitude of somebody or other who had taken a post which I felt should have been given to me, and Sheikh Ahmed said quietly:

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"If I may, I will tell you a story from the writings of Jelal-ud-Din Roumi. We Sufis call God *Al-Hudud*, The Beloved, because none of the ninety-nine Arabic names of Allah mention Divine Love. We maintain that a great love given to God brings about the union of a man's soul with Him——"

A trifle impatiently, I asked for the story.

"I shall tell it," he said. "Jelal-ud-Din Roumi relates that a certain Sufi knocked at the door of The Beloved. A voice answered him, asking, 'Who is there?' To which the lover replied, 'It is I!'

"'Go hence!' rejoined the voice. 'There is no room for thee and Me.'

"But, when one loves much, one persists much; and a second time the seeker knocked. And again the voice questioned as before. This time the lover answered, 'It is *Thou*!'

"'Enter,' said the voice, 'for I am within!'"

I regarded Sheikh Ahmed blankly. I could see no point in the story. I know, now, that the sacred books of the Hindus bid a man love his neighbour as himself because his neighbour *is* himself. "He that knows himself in everything, and everything in himself, will not injure himself by himself." . . . It sounds involved; but I find it logical. In other words, in complete love there is no room for *I* and *Thou*. Anyway, at the end of the story I asked Sheikh Ahmed—out of politeness more than anything else—to tell me why they were called Sufis. He said the name came from the woollen garments they were supposed to wear, *suf* being the Arabic for wool. The apparent advocacy of drunkenness by their poets—Sadi, Hāfiz, and Omar Khayyām were all Sufis—he explained, was figurative, and really means the intoxication of the soul with divine love during the seven stages of progress that are necessary before the longed-for ecstatic union is attained. When it has been reached what has been described as a "sobriety of Union" supervenes. At each stage the meditating Sufi beholds 10,000

## Indian Mosaic

lights, their colour varying according to the degree of knowledge. In the first stage the lights are dull and mixed; in the second blue; and in the seventh green and white. . . . The real inner secret of the Faith is not known outside it. Some of its Persian teachers maintain that wealth is a greater blessing than poverty, since poverty cannot possibly be an attribute of God.

Sheikh Ahmed and I used to go for walks together, and on one occasion I said that it puzzled me how any efficient, practising accountant could hold such a highly esoteric faith, and conform to it. His reply was disarming.

"There is nothing in accounts that is antagonistic either to religion or poetry," he said. "All mathematics are based on truth. The greatest of the Hindu astronomers—and he was even greater than any of ours—composed a poetical treatise on arithmetic, called *Lailavati* [*The Charmer*]."

The astronomer he referred to, Bhaskara, lived in the twelfth century A.D., and I have taken from Sir M. Monier Williams's *Indian Wisdom* a specimen problem from that delightfully named arithmetic:

Out of a swarm of bees, one-fifth part settled on a Kadamba blossom; one-third on a Silindhra flower; three times the difference of these numbers flew to the bloom of a Kataja. One bee, which remained, hovered about in the air. Tell me, charming woman, the number of bees.

"Sufism helps a man in all ways, sahib," said Sheikh Ahmed one day. "Even in his daily work it helps him; the meditations and other practices it enjoins improve the bodily health."

Certainly, all the Sufis I have met have been unusually intelligent, lovable souls, and remarkably eloquent. Here is a prayer composed by a Sufi woman saint, named Rabiya:

O God! If I worship thee for fear of Hell, burn me in hell; if I worship thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me thence; but if I worship thee for Thine own sake, withhold not from me Thine everlasting beauty!

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Sheikh Ahmed liked to carry a flower in his hand and meditate upon it as he walked—a tall, grave figure.

Who is not made a better man  
By contact with a noble friend?  
A mere water-drop upon a lotus leaf  
Assumes the splendour of a pearl.<sup>1</sup>

If only I had understood him!

<sup>1</sup> From the *Hutopadeśa* (*Book of Good Counsel*)

## XV

### *The Spirit and the Flesh*

Fate is unpenetrated causes

LEMRON, *Conduct of Life*

WITH a sense of foreboding, I accepted an invitation to dine with the local Head of the Supply and Transport Corps. Rumour said that my Commanding Officer was a sort of composite monster: a "tiger" and a "queer bird." His unpopularity was apparently a protest against the unheard-of case of a Lieutenant-Colonel occupying a Captain's billet in a much-sought-after station.

In appearance he was soldierly to formidableness, and possessed a voice like a trombone. The Club described him as "a relic of the Honourable East India Company." I was assured that if my head was not chewed off in five minutes after I had arrived at his bungalow—which they said he had bought because it had once belonged to an Indian and had a harem building in the compound—I should certainly be asked to take a nautch-girl in to dinner. Apparently he never invited a married member of the garrison to dine.

I found him a courteous gentleman with incredibly fierce eyes and a pronounced liver, and for some reason took to him at once. He loved fine horses, good wine, and pretty women. Of the good wine I had plenty, and soon told him all about Windy. A little later, soaring on the golden wings of '84 champagne, I confessed pleasedly to having imbibed too much port on my first night in mess. Quite clearly I at once rose in his estimation. Over *his* port I gave detailed biographies of Olive and her grandfather; but these were not so approved. My expressed intention to get married brought advice.

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He thought that no white woman should be asked to face a godforsaken climate that killed her beauty in ten years, separated parents from their children, and made marital relations the subject of bazaar-gossip. "Even the women of the country are old at twenty-five. Still, it's considered impossible to marry one of them, on account of the children. The poor little devils never have a chance; and somehow . . . somehow they fail when it comes to. . . . That port won't hurt you!"

Intending to shunt the conversation, I remarked that Olive loved India almost more than England. At this he wrinkled his nose like a snarling tiger.

"Then she must have been born out here! . . . 'Cannington?' I used to know a Colonel Cannington thirty years ago. In Delhi. He was married to an Indian woman. . . . Have another glass of port."

I sat staring at him. Was I drunk? Or was he? Up to that moment I had felt a pleasing sense of exhilaration, inextricably and pleasantly mixed up with warm admiration for him and his port. Almost instantaneously the admiration wilted and every drop of the wine seemed to have gone to my head; I was waging a frantic fight to hold on to my mental and physical equilibrium lest I should disgrace myself. Even a sickening feeling that I was 'tight' in the presence of my Commanding Officer did not account to me for this "swing-high, swing-low" feeling. Something had been said about Olive . . . and India . . . and a man whose family name was the same as hers. That much . . . That much . . . Children were poor little devils because they were half-castes. . . . Did he—he couldn't mean . . .

As if he had read my thoughts, he said:

"It couldn't have been the same man! I'm sorry. Damned stupid. There were two fellows of that name. I like the look of that pony you ride. If you ever want to sell it . . ."

And somehow the evening passed.

## *Indian Mosaic*

He is long since dead, but there are times when, looking at a certain small photograph, the memory of him comes to me with a sudden vividness.

At the end of my week's stay with the bank manager I moved over to the Dekkan Hotel, whose proprietor was a cheery, stocky little man, a half-caste and a well-known big-game hunter. He was very proud of his museum of hunting trophies, all of which had been shot or speared by himself. Tigers and panthers were his preferred quarry.

"I look upon them only as spiteful cats," he said laughingly. "This one nearly got me; but it wasn't his lucky day!"

I admired a double-barrelled 500 Express, one of four heavy rifles standing in a gun cabinet. He was delighted, and at once took it out, fondling it lovingly before placing it in my hands. It was a beautifully balanced weapon and beautifully kept; the breech mechanism had the heavy, yet easy smoothness, and the dull, yet sharp, *cluck* that are so comfortingly eloquent of safety, precision, and death. I remarked that it *looked* accurate.

"That old rifle never fails to kill, man! Always it brings me luck!"

During the following night I heard somebody groaning in the near-by room; but after a time the sounds ceased—rather suddenly. I knew nothing more until early tea brought the realization that it was a rainy day. That, of course, meant there would be no tennis before breakfast. So, office hours being a lordly 10 to 4, after Narainswami had opened the shutters I put down the empty cup with the clattering uncertainty of the half-awakened, and humping the bed-clothes, went to sleep again.

The hoarse croaking of a crow perched on one of the green window shutters roused me. I studied resentfully the sleek malignity of the bird, which, its head and body tilted

## *The Spirit and the Flesh*

downward, seemed to be studying me. The crow is the messenger of Yama, the Hindu god of Death.

The rain had stopped. From the crow I turned my gaze on to a garden-courtyard filled with dripping croton bushes which a passing gleam of sunshine was painting with liquid gold. At the end of a diagonal red-brick pathway was a window that faced mine. Through it I saw a bed with six tall candles burning by it—three at each side. Somebody was laid out!

With the callousness of youth, I fetched my field-glasses and focused them.

The owner of the 500!

It seems that the previous day a panther had killed a cow in a village, and he had gone after it with the Forest Officer and the British Residency surgeon.

The doctor told me what happened.

"We were waiting for the beaters to drive the beast out of a patch of jungle when it suddenly bounded out in front of the poor devil and went straight for him. It was an easy shot, but for some unknown reason he dropped the 500 Express he was holding and ran! The panther got him in a flash. . . ."

"And only yesterday he told me that his 500 always brought him luck!" I said, stupefied.

"That's rather curious. He and I had exchanged rifles."

For sheer cool courage I have never heard the equal of that shown by a brother officer when beating for a wounded panther. The beast sprang out at him at an angle and knocked him over, and man and panther rolled down a small declivity, an indistinguishable mass of gold and khaki. Like the unfortunate hotel-keeper, my friend dropped his rifle, but he managed to wrench himself round so that his stomach was flat against the panther's belly. Then, before the beast could bite at his face, he thrust his left forearm into its mouth,



## *Indian Mosaic*

to "give it something to go on with," as he put it. "The bones cracked as one cracks the bones of a snipe; but I felt no pain."

His shikaree blew the creature's brains out.

After they had carried him back to the Chitral frontier outpost which he commanded it was nearly twenty-four hours before a doctor could be got. When he came he diagnosed blood-poisoning and amputated the mangled arm at the shoulder-socket.

There was little hope of the sick man pulling through. Daily he grew weaker. An Indian soldier who was a carpenter in civil life was set to making a coffin, and to the sound of his hollow knocking two brother officers deliberated the religious aspect of the situation. They felt that an attempt ought to be made to give the dying man spiritual comfort. No padre being available, the junior subaltern was delegated to go to him with a prayer-book, and ask him if he would like to have something read to him.

"Yes," said the panther's victim. "I'd like you to read me *Soapy Sponge's Sporting Tour*." He alluded, of course, to Surtee's fox-hunting novel of that title.

Several years later I met him in Calcutta. Save that he had only one arm, he was as fit and cheery as ever.

## XVI

### *The Lady of the Miniature*

The thousand strands of the web of fate are so wildly, so strangely, entangled

JOHN S. BRAND

I FOUND the Bangalore bazaar far less interesting than that of Madras—I think because I explored it in a definitely hostile frame of mind: the bazaars are India's social nerve-ganglia, and I was dissecting one of them. India was to be the future home of Olive and myself; I wanted to discover what it was that made her like so much this country of ignorance, brutally-sharp shadows and blinding glare.

On one of these excursions I found myself looking into a junk shop. Spread out on the floor was the usual jumble of rubbish; some small brass figures of Hindu godlings, a couple of villainous-looking Afghan knives, some old bicycle spares, a heap of odd china and saddlery, and, in a small box, a number of leather-covered books.

Old books! . . . I picked up one—an official report on suttee, or widow-burning, sent by the Secretary of Something-or-other to the "Governors of the Hon'ble East India Company." But pages that might have been interesting had been torn out, so I put it down and turned over the heap in the box.

The next second I was not in India. I was in Switzerland. Looking up at me with sombre intentness was the face of Olive.

Actually, it was an indifferently-painted, unframed miniature of a very much younger Indian girl in a dark red *sari* who might have been Olive's twin sister.

Uncanny.

## Indian Mosaic

I stood staring at it.

Would the sahib like to buy an Afghan knife? The shop-keeper drew one of the stabbing-knives from its scabbard.

I took the weapon from him, and fell to scratching with a finger-nail a tiny speck of rust on the blade, wondering all the time whether the painting was antique or modern. I did not want the sinister-looking knife, but if he thought it was the miniature I was after the price would rocket. Therefore, for eighteen inches of burnished murder I offered five rupees. Immediately I had to refuse a battered bicycle-lamp, a picnic basket without a lid, and an incomplete set of ivory chess-men.

"What is that?" I pointed, as casually as might be, to the miniature, chafing at his slowness in answering.

"That is an Indian lady. I will sell it to Your Honour for fifty rupees!"

The price was, of course, exorbitant, and even in those days I was hard up. Although to bargain for such a thing was impossible, still, my bank had written to me rather starchy only that morning. Economy was never one of my strong points.

"I will buy it!" (Who was it speaking?)

Elation brought on an attack of broken English. "Master want feel-glasses?" A pair of antiquated field-glasses weighing pounds were thrust towards me and pushed aside.

I took up the picture and examined it with a bad imitation of nonchalance. The lids of the brooding brown eyes were antimonied and a small line of black at their outer corners gave them an unnatural largeness. But the resemblance to Olive was not only in the eyes and features; this girl's dark hair was loose upon her shoulders and worn in a straight fringe, just as Olive wore hers. The *sari* had a border of tiny gold dots arranged in three-dot triangles—not that that mattered. Painted on some sort of parchment which had been stuck on to an oblong of rough-edged *papier-mâché*, there

## *The Lady of the Miniature*

was nothing to indicate either the name of the sitter or the artist.

The price demanded was paid with something of a qualm. Bankers can be so unreasonable, though mine have invariably been lineal descendants of Job.

I wanted to be alone with this pictured face; to look with a magnifying-glass into the depths of the sombre painted eyes, and try to surprise in them (silly young fool!) the meaning of that look.

## XVII

### *Unfavourable Stars*

We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go  
Round with the Sun-illumin'd Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show

OMAR KHAYYAM, *The Rubayāt*

ONE of Sheikh Ahmed's friends was a gaunt, ill-tempered looking fakir-magician who had no eyebrows, no moustache, and no beard. Every hair on his body had been either shaved off or plucked out, in accordance with custom prevailing among certain sects of Mohammedan ascetics. Although voluminously clad, he looked almost indecent.

Would he give a small demonstration of his magical powers? I asked. The glabrous one demurred. He could, he said, cure illnesses from a distance by means of a charm, if he knew the exact day on which the person had fallen ill. Had I the sick person's horoscope?

A little surprised at the question, for Olive had been in my thoughts, I said I had not. Did *he* cast horoscopes? Yes, he did; but not often, as he was not an astrologer by profession. I gathered that he rather looked down on star-gazers.

With vernacular compliments, I requested him to cast my horoscope, but he said that he would rather not. There was an astrologer in Bangalore to whom I could go if I wished.

Gratitude must have been inexplicably apparent in me, for he started to talk quite pleasantly after that. Among other things he told me how to command the presence of a *djinn*. And this is the manner of it: After carrying out certain austerities rather in the manner of a Catholic priest when preparing for an exorcism, the fakir must shut himself in a

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room, the walls of which are daubed with red ochre, and there burn incense. He must have under control the five creatures which inhabit the body of a man: the snake that is in the ears, which takes revenge for things that anger it; the kite that sits in the eyes, which covets what it sees; the black bee that is in the nostrils, which envies all sweet odours; the dog whose seat is the tongue and who delights in all savoury things; and the scorpion which stings in forbidden places. . . . The smallest error in the proceeding might mean death or madness, I was solemnly assured. The casting out of devils was his long suit; particularly hermaphrodite devils, who are evidently by far the most obstinate, though even these may be defeated by repeating over some perfumed oil a certain verse of the Holy Koran and then blowing the oil into the possessed person's ear. There are also charms to be inscribed on paper, which is then burned in the flame of a lamp and the ashes eaten by the afflicted and grateful client. *Kalik*, the soot which collects under cooking-pots, makes the best ink for this purpose. Sometimes these charms are written on a chalked board, which is then washed and the water given to the demoniac to drink. If, as is not infrequently done, a picture of the demon in possession is drawn, hideousness is the exorcist's most potent asset, the idea apparently being that the evil spirit is so depressed by the sight of his own likeness that he hastens to get away from it. The hairless man said that sometimes the demoniacs tried to run away from him, and he had to hold on to their hair and pull them to the ground despite their astonishing strength. One of the fallen person's hairs was then put into a bottle, which was corked and buried. An immediate invocation of *Mahik Gutshan*, the king of all the *djnnns*, who lives on a mythical mountain called "*Quaf*"—"Q," in other words—attended by 300,000 slaves, made it quite certain that the cork did not come out of the bottle, which, of course, contained the demon.

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When I asked this past-master of demonology why he had never called up a *djinn* and demanded to be made wealthy, he said he had never done so because he had never wanted to do so. "He displayed the usual detestable evasiveness of the Indian," comments my diary unfairly.

Sheikh Ahmed asked the poor man to show me a silver ring, on the square signet-surface of which was engraved the numerical value of a certain *djinn's* name. Mohammedan magicians make much use of numbers.

Taking the ring out of a lambskin bag, he said that I could have it because I was a friend of the "Sheikh-sahib."

"How much?"

He glowered. "It is necessary to fast for forty days before one can use it. And that," he added sharply, "no sahib could do!" The talisman was replaced.

By way of easing the tension, Sheikh Ahmed quoted a Hindustani pun that occurs in a love couplet from *Bagh-o-Bahar*. Now, the making of such puns is a habit with Persian poets, and, as this happens to be a typical specimen, I give it with a slightly bewildering explanation: In Hindustani the words *chillay khinchna* mean both 'to bend a bow' and 'to fast [or toil] for forty days.'

Why should she, whose eyebrows are as a bow which  
has been drawn taut,

Not come to one who, for her sake, has fasted for forty  
days?

It sounds poor stuff in English, I know; but its cleverness lies in the fact that, in Persian script, the italicized words in each line, despite their utterly different meaning, are written and pronounced almost exactly the same.

The astrologer recommended to me by the hairless magician duly cast my horoscope—but under difficulties. I could not tell him the exact hour of my birth. He was much concerned about it. A difference of a few hours, he pointed

## *Unfavourable Stars*

out, might mean that I belonged to the House of Venus, the celestial prostitute, or to that of Saturn, the celestial eunuch; a very different matter. In more ways than one it was no slight difference, for the first planet is propitious and the second the reverse. He finally decided on Venus: "Those born under that planet are spruce, and possessed of a singing voice," says a Mohammedan book on magic.

I regret to record that the finished horoscope was a gloomy document: a change and a great disaster were swiftly approaching. In fact, there was little else in it. Perhaps he wasn't altogether a good astrologer. He certainly did not fulfil the Hindu requirements for one: a proper astrologer must have "a friendly appearance; be fashionable in his dress; have compact, well-formed limbs; in short, be a fine man . . . with a deep, clear voice, for generally one's good and bad moral qualities are in unison with one's personal appearance." My particular astrologer was a toothless old pantaloone whom I heartily begrudged the fifteen rupees he charged.

A veritable golden harvest ripens for these men when they are called in for consultation by a wealthy Hindu who wants to build a house. An astrologer must approve the plan of the building, and an astrologer must pronounce upon the suitability of the ground; and if the site is being bought from a third party the seller will often bribe the reader of the stars to give a propitious declaration. Not until an astrologer has given his permission may the door-frames be set up, for an unfavourable star might be visible through them. The main beam can only be hoisted into position at the exact moment the astrologer indicates.

My particular astrologer claimed that the Hindus were the first to name the planets and to discover the zodiac. Whether his statement was correct or not matters little, but there are strange similarities between our Western myths and those of India—witness the resemblance between the



## *Indian Mosaic*

Sanskrit astronomical name *Kasiyapa* and our—or the Greek—Cassiopeia. It seems pretty clear that the West has borrowed much from India. The Greek Apollo, for instance, is little more than a Westernized Krishna—even to the invention of the flute and the fugitive nymph who became a bush. This subject has been delightfully treated by Edward Moore in his *Oriental Fragments*.

A week or so after the casting of my horoscope I received orders posting me to the command of a Transport Unit in Bareilly. Bareilly is a pretty station with splendid shooting; and to get the command of a Transport Unit was the faint hope of most Supply and Transport junior officers.

In those days, a Pack Mule Corps of 840 animals was divided into eight troops, each commanded by a *kote-duffadar*, or Indian sergeant, with lesser-grade Indian N.C.O.'s to assist him. Two British warrant officers, each commanding a half-corps or sub-division, two British sergeants, a quartermaster-sergeant, an Indian officer, and a veterinary assistant completed the outfit. Mules are the best form of transport on mountain tracks and in the water-courses that seam the Indian frontier. Linked in strings of three, each beast carries a dead weight of 240 lb., and, although they take up a good deal of road-length, in the event of a four-legged breakdown a fallen animal and two boxes or sacks are an easy matter to handle and clear, compared with, say, a disabled five-ton lorry and its contents that blocks completely a road barely wide enough for its wheel-span. . . . Incidentally, the commandant of a Mule Corps had the powers of a commanding officer of a regiment.

I was delighted at my good luck.

Narainswami said he was sorry, but he must leave me.

“Why?”

“My house has fallen down.”

Now, the mud houses of all India have a way of falling down in the rains; in fact, that particular tendency is the

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Indian equivalent of the funeral of the office boy's grandmother. I told Narainswami that his domiciliary *débâcle* was altogether too coincidental to be accepted as the truth. He repeated that he was leaving. He could be very obstinate.

"But who is going to look after me if you go?" It sounds unsympathetic, but I felt that way.

"I have another, very good man, for Master."

"But the telegram has only just come! You couldn't have had time to get a *badli* |substitute|!"

He smiled at that Sherlock Holmes effort.

"The letter came from my house three days ago."

It was typical that he, a Hindu, should choose as his relief-man a Mohammedan. He doubtless had a score of relations, or *bhais*—certainly any number of co-religionists who would have paid him well to recommend them for the post. But he knew that a Mohammedan servant would be more useful to me up north than a Hindu, and that was what mattered.

Having left farewell cards all over the Cantonment and Civil Lines and dispatched jubilant telegrams to St Moritz and London, I joined my new bearer on the platform of the Main Railway Station. *Dustoor*, or custom, demanded the absence of Narainswami.

The new man, his beard a-bristle, was cursing *sotto voce*, and unobtrusively pinching, a crowd of jabbering coolies. His exhortations to them—delivered between curses and pinches—to "go with very great care with our Sahib's possessions" were impassioned efforts.

"They are all dog-worshippers and due to frizzle in Hell for eternity," he protested, when I remonstrated with him for switching their shins with a rattan cane.

The total mass of "our Sahib's possessions," though it was imposing, represented little more than the normal incubus of an unmarried officer in transit.

## Indian Mosaic

Balanced on various coolies' heads were:

Two tin trunks.	A camp-bed
A uniform case.	A camp-chair.
Two suitcases.	A camp-table.
A tin dispatch box.	A camera.
A bedding roll.	A bundle of walking and climbing sticks
A boot box.	A hog spear
Two tents.	A helmet-case.
Two gun-cases.	A tiffin basket.
A cartridge magazine.	A box of books.
Fishing-rods.	An assortment of lamps—and oddments.
A tin ice-box.	( <i>N B.</i> All lamps leak mysteri- ously to emptiness on a journey.)
Two boxes of saddlery.	

*Total* Twenty-seven or so pieces. Something like one thousand pounds avoirdupois

The burden of the heftiest coolie consisted of the fishing-rods, while the weediest of them all staggered under the coffin-like uniform case, the weight of which seemed to have driven his head into his shoulders. He reminded me of a monkey carrying a tree-trunk. The new bearer, draped with the Kodak camera and a thermos bottle, carried the rattan cane.

The roar of escaping steam from the engine, and the incredible din of a jostling, hurrying multitude of people in a state of anguished excitement and bewilderment, rolled deafeningly round the iron-girdered roof. A sense of apartness from it all thrilled me pleasantly. *I* had no need to worry. *I* was young, fit, and strong. *I* had the Government of India behind me. *I was* the Government of India—here! And the gods had been good to me. Barely two years after reaching India *I* was on my way to take up an independent command. *I* was Somebody! John Nicholson must have felt like that, *I* thought.

Nonchalantly, silk-suited, white-topi'd, feeling that *I* knew

## *Unfavourable Stars*

all there was to be known about travelling in Hindustan, I brought up the rear of that staggering and vociferating caravan, carrying my railway warrant. . . . Would I please change it for a ticket? asked an Anglo-Indian ticket inspector politely. There was no arguing the point: I had to leave my baggage convoy and go back to the ticket office.

Although it was before the advent of the present-day *de luxe* eight-berth coaches of the Indian railroads in which one can travel at a cost of less than a farthing a mile more than one pays for a third-class ticket in the United Kingdom, I had an entire first-class carriage to myself (a compartment three times the size of those we have in England, its two seats running longitudinally) with two overhead electric fans, a fragrant but dusty thermantidote, a tiled bathroom, slat sun-blinds, glass windows tinted against the glare, and gauze shutters to keep out mosquitoes at night. Into this small palace on wheels, with much grunting, were thrust the bedding roll, the ice-box, the gun-cases, the fishing-rods, the two suitcases, the cartridge magazine, the helmet-case, and the tiffin basket. As if by magic, they slithered into invisibility under the two seats, leaped on to the roomy racks, or vanished behind the bathroom door.

Standing on the platform glancing through a magazine purchased at the bookstall—I would have many days and nights to spend inside the carriage—I observed a young European standing on the running-board (things since abolished in India) of the compartment next to mine. Four frontier Pathans seemed to be watching him; but they moved off when they observed me looking at them.

Lord, what a noise there was! All over the platform were squatting groups of Indians, chattering at the top of their thin metallic voices. Laden third-class passengers, making for the train, fell over them. But it did not matter; everybody was sympathetic with everybody else. There were recumbent sleeping Indians too, swathed corpse-wise in white sheets,

## *Indian Mosaic*

who had come to take a train that would start . . . in twelve hours' time? Well, whenever it might be. It, too, did not matter. In India Time is not money; it is *maya*, illusion. The piercing cries of the vendors of "*Cha-garm-dūdh*" ("Hot tea and milk"), "*Mithai*" ("Sweetmeats"), "*Mewā, baray achchay mewā*" ("Fruit, very good fruit!"), and half a dozen others, rose and fell pleasantly upon my not too attentive ears.

The third-class passengers were packed like the proverbial sardines. Cloth bundles of all shapes and sizes were stowed under their legs and bulged from the narrow racks above their heads, the overflow being piled in their laps. Their courtesy to each other was marvellous. A laden voyager would insist, for several minutes, that another equally laden passenger should precede him into one of the windowed sardine-tins; every one apologized, either by word or gesture, even for falling over an obstructing platform-squatter. Whenever a fresh wedge of humanity was driven into the crowded complement of a third-class carriage by a muscular Anglo-Indian inspector, the apparently impossible was accomplished; room was made for the newcomer. The wedge, during its transit, never ceased to appeal to the others to realize his utter helplessness, a courteousness that elicited a babel of sympathetic assents, advice, and vigorous and helpful tuggings.

Even in this railway station naked ascetics with towers of matted hair stalked aloofly through the anxious crowd, red-eyed, ash besmeared, and arrogantly conscious of their spiritual overlordship. But not all their magic, holiness, and awesomeness availed one whit in the face of the cubic capacity problem. They too were thrust, squeezed, and bundled in somehow. They seemed rather to enjoy it.

A whistle blew.

Clamour increased to wild tumult. A band of salaaming coolies surged up to me for baksheesh. Mohammed Baksh

## *Unfavourable Stars*

jammed on the turban he had momentarily taken off in the privacy of the adjoining servant's compartment, and swooped down on them.

"*Hut-jao, bay-imānān!*" ("Begone, faithless ones!").

And they went, reluctantly, gazing at small coins held in their palms, as men do who have been underpaid. Perhaps they *were* underpaid; but it was no concern of mine. I was watching with considerable amusement a stout Bengali lopping up the platform with a white umbrella grasped in one hand and a cage containing a partridge dangling from a finger of the other. As he ran there came a salvo of door-bangings. Anglo-Indian Inspector-dom spotted him, wrenched open a door, seized Bengal by the back of his loin-cloth and heaved him—partridge, umbrella, and all—on to the jammed knees of patient India.

The last door slammed. The train gave one or two slow dislocating jerks. We were off.

Would all this excitement never end? Up the platform was now racing a Sapper friend of mine whom we used to call "Frog," an ugly lad with a heart of gold. He was waving something.

Running to keep pace with the train, he thrust a telegram into my hand. . . .

"Any answer?"

I shook my head.

What answer could there be to a telegram that read, "Olive died suddenly to-day"?



BAREILLY





## XVIII

### *A Journey Northward*

.        their daggers  
Unmannerly breech'd with gore.

SHAKESPEARE, *Macbeth*

IT is curious how the mind, under certain stresses, endows with speech a rhythmic sound. The wheels of the bogie beat out her name hour after hour through a seemingly endless night. "Ol-ive! . . . Ol-ive! . . ." Sometimes the dead, double *click-clack* changed to four-time, and thudded out, "Ol-ive is dead! . . . Ol-ive is dead! . . ." An interminable, lacerating repetition.

At every stop I got out into the hot night and walked the platform, a shooting-jacket over my pyjamas. The Indian names on the big white name-boards might have been Chinese for all they meant to me. St Moritz and the name of her sanatorium were the only place-names in my mind. Sometimes, with a sickening ache, I saw a room in the sanatorium. . . .

In the morn my grief was as a bud;  
All the day it was an opening flower,  
When night had come it expanded into full bloom,

sang Tiravallur, the Tamil cobbler-poet. . . .

Like one in a dream who is conscious that it is a dream and that an awakening will soon end it, I watched at each halt the third-class passengers clamber on to the permanent way from the farther side of the train, and there squat. . . . I studied intently every movement of the *bihishtis*,<sup>1</sup> or water-carriers, whose name means "Those of paradise," as they squirted with splashless precision thin silver streams of water from one short and flaccid leg of their goat's-skin water-bags

<sup>1</sup> Usually incorrectly rendered 'Bishtis.'

## *Indian Mosaic*

into the cupped palms of other squatting voyagers, who held their hands under their chins and so drank. Their thirst satisfied, they would draw a spread palm downward over their faces from nose to chin. They had simple, kindly faces, I noticed; and the fact that their eyes were incurious when momentarily they rested upon me, woke in me a queer sense of gratitude that was not far removed from sympathy.

I spoke to one of them, an old man who was superintending the complicated drinking operations of two very small children. The Indian's kindness to children is beautiful to see. . . . No, he was not tired; but the little ones were; their house was two days' journey from Bangalore by bullock-cart, and they were going to his brother, who was a *mistri*, or carpenter, in Bombay. . . .

"Come, Little Mother!"—this to a mite of three—"Thou shalt have a sweetmeat! Is not that good news?" He fumbled awkwardly with a corner of the coarse sheet that was drawn cowlwise over his head, and, undoing a knot in it, produced a small yellow sugar-ball. "Half to thy brother, Littlest One!"

"Where is their mother, *Baba* [father]?"

"She and their father died of the plague, sahib, four days ago. . . . Salaam to the sahib for his gift, O Light of my Eyes!"

God! This Death, this omnipresent Death!

I returned to the close heat of my carriage. It, or one like it, was to be my home for another four nights and five days. The existence of two thousand miles of steel road between Bangalore and Bareilly explained why Narainswami's house had fallen down!

Somewhere between Bhopal and Orchha<sup>1</sup> the train came to a standstill in the middle of the night. Instantly half-sleep became wakefulness. Halts on that journey were like oases in a desert; they gave shelter from blazing fires.

<sup>1</sup> Actually, it was neither Bhopal nor Orchha

## *A Journey Northward*

I put my head out of the window. Where were we? We seemed to be nowhere; we were in no station and at no siding; merely standing still in a hot darkness of night, out of which came a far-away hissing and the pulsating throb of a piston: "*Tsss-dsss . . . tsss-dsss . . .*"

The eerie laughter of jackals came to me on the hot air. Listening to it, I remembered a doggerel verse that gives exactly the sound, if it is said very quickly:

A dead Hindoo-oo! a dead Hindoo-oo!  
Where? Where?  
Here! Here!

It is a clever onomatopœia.

Slowly the black flatness of plains stretching to infinite horizons showed itself, and a few stunted trees became visible. Voices were audible in the welcome stillness. At the rear end of the train a lamp was bobbing, and from the stumbling sounds of booted feet on sleepers and ballast it was evident that its carrier was running. The lighted train-wall had sprouted heads, mostly unturbaned. I could recognize Mohammed Baksh's silvery hogged poll. Inquiries were being exchanged, and questions flung at the guard carrying the lamp. Stout and breathless, his white uniform coat was unbuttoned. Never did his answer vary: "*Malūm nahin!*" ("I don't know").

"Did you pull the alarm, sir?" (This to me.) "Then perhaps it was the gentleman in the next carriage."

Clambering awkwardly on to the running-board, he opened the door and disappeared from sight.

"*Murder!*"

The whisper ran down the line of sprouted heads. God knows how India learns things so quickly, but she does. Indians must be highly telepathic, or super-normally psychic. Anyway, a second later the guard was standing at the door, shouting, "Is there a doctor in the train? *Koe haḳīm hai?*"

## Indian Mosaic

A small Indian carrying an attaché-case dropped down from a second-class compartment.

"I am doctor! *Kya hua?* | What has happened? |"

He too disappeared into the next carriage. Hot-foot after him hurried a Goanese, buckling his belt as he went. He was the young European's servant. Then Mohammed Baksh descended, and, salaaming gravely as he passed, but without looking up at me, followed the Goanese.

"What's the matter?" I had clambered down and met the guard.

"A most bloody murder, sir! . . . Holy Mother of God, what a Bobbery! Headquarters will make! . . . If you are not a friend of the deceased man, kindly get back into your coach!"

The engine-driver, a grimed and burly North-countryman, rolled up to us, wiping huge paws on a bit of oily waste. His face shone with sweat.

"What t' Hell's oop, Jack?"

It was so refreshingly English that I had some difficulty in stifling an impulse to hug him.

"My Jesus, man! A bloody murder! It is frightful luck! . . . Push on! Push on at top speed for Jhansi!" He waved his lamp and blew a shrill blast on his whistle.

"Hold hard, lad! Ah'm *here*—not on t' engine! A'rect, Ah'll stop at Mowglipur t' telegraph Jhansi!"

They moved away in opposite directions, their feet scrunching on the ballast shingle.

I swung myself up and looked into the disordered carriage. One of the blades of the overhead fan was bent and clicking viciously.

"Is he dead?"

The doctor glanced up.

"No, thank you. Most fortunately the ribs saved!"

<sup>1</sup> Anglo-Hindustani corruption of *Bap-re* ("O thou Father!") It has come to mean 'disturbance'

## *A Journey Northward*

"Can I be of any use?"

"No, thank you. There is nothing. I shall manage with the servant."

A faint voice spoke from the red-and-white on the seat.

"I'm all right. . . . Four of them got in. . . . *Ouch!*"

Back in my own carriage I mentally slumped, like the Eurasian guard. Murder? By whom? "Four of them got in." . . . The four Pathans! . . . Poor devil! What did those swine think he had done to them? What a rotten, god-forsaken place India was!

I think the shock of it all did me good.

Opening my dispatch box to get a pencil and paper, the first thing I put my hand upon was the miniature. The painted face looked up at me sombrely, the points of resemblance seemingly stronger; but firmly I thrust it out of sight. Still, for all that,

No easier nor no quicker passed  
The impracticable hours.

One of Sheikh Ahmed's quotations kept recurring to me: "Death is a bridge whereby the lover is joined to the Beloved."

As I saw it then, it was a reference to a mortal Beloved.

A bare two minutes' halt at Mowglipur showed me a way-side station with one stunted tree and a tall watering hydrant that ended in a black curve like an elephant's trunk. Behind and beyond these things was the same hot blackness.

The Babu in charge telegraphed, and Jhansi was ready for us. A doctor, a stretcher, and a police inspector and several constables were grouped on the platform. In no country in the world is an emergency quicker met and better dealt with than in India. Night and day the air quivers with potential emergencies, the storm-centre of which is the North-west Frontier.

But they're all met.

## *Indian Mosaic*

At dawn came Gwalior.

The dominating black mass of the great rock that marks Scindia's capital loomed against a lemon-and-silver sky. According to a book I had read, there should have been a purple mist encircling its summit; in the old days (the book said) that mist used to kill the prisoners kept there in a tower.

But there was no sign of it. From the legend, however, sprang my recent novel, *The Poisoned Mountain*.

A little window at one end of the compartment slid back.

"Tea, sahib!"

And so we reached Bareilly.

## XIX

### *Salute to Ganesh*

Beauteous is Earth, but all its forest broods  
Plot mutual slaughter, hungering to live.

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, *The Light of Asia*

BAREILLY was very literally a sportsman's paradise. Tiger-, panther-, and alligator-shooting were within easy reach, and small game abounded. There were black partridge and hare in my own compound, and a captain in the cavalry regiment stationed there used to ride after panther, armed with a hog-spear. I never had the slightest desire to join him.

It often happens in the frequent shifting of officers in India that certain of us seem, for some unknown reason, to follow each other from station to station. Coincidence? I don't know. Anyway, I had not been two months in Bareilly before Frog walked into my bungalow one afternoon. He had been moved to Agra, and had travelled the hundred and seventy miles to dine and sleep in Bareilly. In India distance is not regarded as an obstacle, but merely as a means to an end.

When, some time later, I received orders to hold myself in readiness to leave Bareilly and proceed north, I at once decided to run down to Calcutta from Friday to Tuesday; in other words to make a journey of seven hundred and sixty-two miles in order to find out from Army Headquarters what was likely to happen to me. In England a subaltern would hardly travel unconcernedly one thousand five hundred and twenty-four miles for such a trivial reason. To me it seemed perfectly natural. It was just something that happened. As a matter of fact, I was induced to stay away ten days, in order to see the sun rise on Mount Everest. The glory of that



## *Indian Mosaic*

sunrise—which I was more than fortunate to behold, as it is rarely visible—was well worth *two* journeys double the distance. The loneliness and remote grandeur of the scene swept one into an angelless Paradise.

There used to be current in India a saying to the effect that "Every officer of the Royal Engineers is mad, married, or Methodist." Frog was a Sapper, and he was neither married nor Methodist; but he was mad about *shikar*. His idea of supreme happiness was to chase black-buck all day, walking twenty-five miles in the process, and then sit up for panther all night. He said that his appetite was always better when he dined in his shirt-sleeves and hadn't shaved for three days. Duty permitting, he made a point of shooting something or other every week-end.

His greeting when he stalked into my bungalow that day was characteristic:

"Hullo! I've applied for the job of garrison engineer to this place. It has got some of the best shooting in India, though the black-buck *shikar* round Agra is damn' good. How are you?"

The shooting-trips we went on together come back to me vividly—the tang of wood-smoke, the breakfasts under the stars, the jolting of the roofless elephant howdahs, the comforting coldness of rifle-barrels. . . . I could almost turn in my swivel writing-chair, in Chelsea, and say, "Here's your *machan*, Frog!" and once more watch him clamber into the small and frail platform of cut branches built in the fork of a tree on which one sits when waiting for a tiger or panther to come to the bait just below it.

Frog got his transfer to Bareilly, and before a week was out had arranged a crocodile-shoot on the Ramgunga river. Now, crocodile-shooting never attracted me; the reptiles I shot at got away too frequently, even though wounded. In fact, taking this question of sport "by and

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large," as the sailors say, I was never really glad to kill anything. Whenever I went shooting I had a feeling of not being completely 'free'; as if an invisible Some One, whom I did not care for very much, had taken me out to shoot things. I realize that it sounds foolish; but it was very real to me, despite my love for fine weapons. Perhaps I was unconsciously influenced by the mass opinion of the people about the taking of life. It is strange that although India has probably the best shooting in the world, Hindus rarely, if ever, hunt. They see God in all living things, for in the *Mahabharata* it is written, "Only those who are compassionate towards all living creatures deserve to see God. . . ."

We started at dawn, intending to drift down the river, shooting as we drifted, returning by train in the evening—if we could get a train.

"If we can't," said Frog, "we'll sleep in a village. It's hot enough to do without bedding."

"Sleep in a village! I'd rather walk all night! Think of the dirt and the bugs! . . ."

I wish it were possible to set down on paper the majestic peace of dawn on one of India's rivers. The unutterable peace of it. The huge, flat spaciousness of the surrounding country. The great expanse of water slowly changing from black to beige; from beige to bright yellow; from yellow to gold; and then back to beige—for Indian mud is usually beige. Then come the thin, plaintive cries of the water-birds and peacocks; the soft lowing of cattle; the strident screech of the Persian water-wheels irrigating the thirsty soil; and, later, small splashings and sharp smackings as the village women fill their water-jars or beat linen on a flat stone. . . .

We had two or three ineffective long-range shots at crocodiles that were lying like logs at all angles on the sand-bars and mid-river islets. One or two of them had their jaws wide open and small brown birds were walking in and out of them. The boatmen said they were picking red thread-like

## *Indian Mosaic*

leeches from the insides of the gaping mouths and pink throats.

About midday we shot a small *magar* and landed on the sandbank to get it.

"Ready for lunch?" The suggestion was mine, of course. Frog was squirting a syphon down his throat.

"All right. But for God's sake don't let's waste a lot of time eating!" Carefully wrapping a handkerchief round the breech-lock of his rifle, my companion sat down, and, pushing his khaki sola topi to the back of his head in the way he had, descanted on the excellence of fried crocodile's tongue.

I opened the squeaky lid of the tiffin basket.

"Golly, I'd rather be here than in cantonments, wouldn't you?" He yawned happily.

Flicking at a brace of hornets that were investigating the jam tin, I nodded; but with not much heart. The glare from the river was blinding and a host of flies had found us. Fairly near, knee-deep in water, the two boatmen were disembowelling the young crocodile, and the wind was our way.

"Put the——"

A thin strident cry, a shouting and splashing from the river, and an oath from Frog, all seemed to happen simultaneously. The next second he was running towards the boat, clawing at the handkerchief wrapped round his rifle breech.

A crocodile had seized one of the men. The other was beating the water with an oar and shouting to us.

"*Magar usko pakarlia! Magar usko pakarlia! Māro, māro!*" ("A crocodile has seized him! Shoot it! Shoot it!")

But it was impossible to shoot into that ugly, bubbling, lashing turmoil of yellow water. Every now and then portions of the man's back became visible about five yards from

## *Salute to Ganesh*

the edge of the sandbank. He seemed to be doubled up over the reptile's snout. It was impossible to see clearly what was happening. Fortunately the current was sluggish.

Then that mad sapper waded in, up to his knees, but had to stop owing to the steep slope. I shouted to him to come back. But he took no notice and stood there, his rifle at the ready. Frog could look very grim.

It was soon over. The man came to the surface and swam towards us. The other boatman helped him ashore, questioning him babblingly. He had escaped, it seemed, by digging his thumbs into the crocodile's eyes.

We got him into the boat, and late that afternoon, into hospital. Not a word of complaint did he utter from beginning to end. He died from hæmorrhage and shock.

The women of India show a surprising contempt of crocodiles when filling their water-jars. From the stomachs of these reptiles I have seen taken glass and metal bangles, evidence of more than one resulting tragedy. Although *magars* do eat corpses, no corpse ever has bangles upon it.

In Karachi an Indian offered to *run across* the crowded crocodile tank a few miles to the north of the city by leaping from back to back of the basking crocodiles, but the performance was stopped by the police. I believe one of the Beresford family performed this daring act successfully.

A savage young crocodile was once the 'hero' of a story, which, although simple, has a certain grim humour. A small specimen some five feet in length, packed in a narrow crate—which tapered slightly at one end to prevent the reptile breaking the slats by lashing its powerful tail—was being brought home by an officer for presentation to the Zoological Gardens. During the voyage a close-fitting canvas cover was put over this box-like cage after feeding, to keep its ill-tempered occupant tranquil.

Arrived at Marseilles, the officer got four men to lift the crate on to their shoulders, and preceded them down the

## *Indian Mosaic*

gangway to force a way for them through the dense crowd on the quay.

To his surprise everybody fell back respectfully, and most of the men took their hats off. . . .

I came into closer touch with Ganesh and his people in Bareilly.

For some reason or other I had purchased a small, gaudily painted plaster statue of the Elephant-headed One, which I kept upon the mantelpiece. I don't know why, but it seemed a particularly friendly godling, and I horrified the austere orthodox Mohammed Baksh by putting a vase of flowers on either side of it for fun. Ganesh looked benevolent and contented in that setting, I thought; I even pretended to myself that he liked it. Anyway, what did it matter?

The Station Supply Officer having applied for short leave, I was officiating for him in addition to my duties as Commandant of the Mule Corps, and became for three whole months lord and master of the six Government elephants that were in Supply and Transport charge. The responsibility was *nil*. No sahib would be such a fool as to interfere with a reliable mahout in his managing or feeding of an elephant. On the other hand, a lord and master of elephants can give picnic and shooting-parties and take his guests out, regally, on elephants, and ride on one himself whenever he wants to. By far the best way to see an Indian city is to ride through it in a howdah.

I soon realized how much in request elephants can be in the lives of simple people: Mohammed Baksh was marrying off his daughter; would the Presence let him have two elephants for the big day of the two-day wedding? The Presence would. . . . The railway people were giving a children's party; would I lend two elephants for the afternoon? I did.

Now, one of the six was a surly bull named Lakshman, who had a bad reputation. He had, it was said, years before,

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squashed like a ripe orange a keeper who had done something to displease him. Personally, I expect the man deserved it. Animals know curious things. And that brings me to an amusing incident.

The day after I took over charge of these pachyderms the head mahout brought all six of them up to my bungalow on their way back from exercise. Five were flapping their ears in the road outside my gate when Lakshman and his rider rolled up outside the veranda. The first notice I had of his presence was a shrill, harsh trumpeting and the frantic yapping of my two dogs—Lion and Patsy, a rough-haired terrier and fox-terrier bitch, respectively. Elephants hate dogs.

When I came out to see what all the fuss was all about I was confronted with a rustling grey mountain whose name was Lakshman. If the Presence would deign to come out into the road, the mahout explained, he would order the six to salute. It was a good *tamasha* to see, he said, as they knelt down afterwards.

“But they have already saluted me! I heard them.”

“Sahib, you heard a very strange thing! My lord Lakshman ” (he dealt the bony grey forehead a crack with the iron ankus that would have broken a man’s skull) “speaks to no one. Yet he has spoken to you!”

I read baksheesh into the implied compliment.

“You mean he never trumpets?”

“Sahib, he speaks only when he goes past the Ganesh temple. And *this* is not a temple of Ganesh!” . . .

Obviously the mahout must have known that the barking of the dogs had angered old Lakshman, but I felt that he had earned very cleverly the rupee I gave him.

That afternoon, and occasionally later, I rode round the city on Lakshman and heard him trumpet as he passed the shrine of Ganesh. Maybe he was calling a priest who gave him balls of the brown cane-sugar that is called *gur*.

## *Indian Mosaic*

He asked for it and said "Thank you" in ridiculous little squeaks high up in his wrinkled trunk. His keeper swore that Lakshman was a hundred years old; and, looking into the infinite malice in his small eyes, it seemed to me that a century was too short a time for its accumulating. After all, Ajax, the great fighting elephant of King Porus, who fought against Alexander the Great, was found 350 years after Alexander's death, still wearing the inscribed silver plate which the world-conquerer had ordered to be hung upon him.

Yes, Lakshman was certainly half as old as Ajax.

## XX

### *Adieu, Frog!*

Frog scorched his boots in the fire after arguing about evolution of the soul. Rabid *re* French in India, and the Hindu-Mohammedan question.

*Extract from my diary*

A SILLY sort of entry. But those three lines summarize the last real ding-dong argument Frog and I ever had. Very shortly afterwards he was killed in an accident.

One of the most lovable of men, opinionatedness exasperated him, and on occasions he would launch at me with savage suddenness the javelin of some unanswerable retort. Then it became unequal argument between a Sapper who was a Varsity man, and a vehement but generally unconvincing theorist who had had no public school life. Of course, I stood little chance. It was, I think, his way of educating me. At the beginning of those discussions the more wrong my theories were the more certain I was that they were right; but, as a rule, towards the end I was fairly grateful for the dressing-down I received, even though, as happened sometimes, we reached something resembling a compromise.

On one occasion we were on a shooting trip. Sitting by the camp fire after dinner, we had agreed that the human soul had not evolved because it is not in its nature to do so. That was the sort of argument Frog liked to start.

To reconstruct the scene; he was knocking out his pipe before turning in, when I mentioned that Sheikh Ahmed had said "the progress of the soul towards spiritual freedom is like a man escaping from a gaol, who opens, one after another, the locked doors that stand between him and



## Indian Mosaic

liberty." I had not understood it at the time it was said to me, and this seemed a good opportunity to get a translation of it; an *ex-cathedra* ruling, so to speak.

Frog, who had a mind like a calculating machine, frowned.

"What does he mean by 'doors'?" And how does he imagine the escaper 'opens' them?"

"The 'doors' meant 'ignorance,' he said," I explained. "And the love of each true friend we make is a key——"

"And if one has a fool for a friend?" The dark ugliness was lit by a puckish grin.

"Quite so; I didn't agree with him myself, Frog! In fact, I wrote in my diary that same night: 'Sheikh Ahmed ought to get married.' Obviously, the love between a man and a woman is the only really great friendship——" I felt I was getting out of my depth.

"Only a *man* understands Friendship! You're a damn' mass of contradictions! Why? Well, I'll tell you! You write reams of poetry about the superlative sweetness and gentleness of Woman; and yet you refuse to go into the women's part of the club. In that ode which you showed me the other day you said a friend is 'the greatest treasure the World can lend'—why 'lend,' unless it is to rhyme with 'friend,' I don't know—*now* you say that a biological partnership is superior to it. . . . Just wait a minute! . . . You tell me—you're *always* telling me—that your *drabis*<sup>1</sup> are 'lovable fellows'; and yet you treat our beaters as if they were dogs! You wallow in the conversation of that fat Brahmin, Balmokund, who's a toady; but Haji<sup>2</sup> Abdulla, who is a scholar and has put himself out a hell of a lot to be nice to us on this shooting-trip, you say bores you!"

I left Balmokund undefended and took up the *haji* charge.

"He doesn't want me to talk to him!"

<sup>1</sup> The vernacular name for a man enlisted in a transport unit

<sup>2</sup> A *haji* is one who has performed the *haj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca

## *Adieu, Frog!*

"He'd like you to be polite to him! . . . I'm not in the Indian Army, but I'll bet I know more about Indians than you do! Why don't you read their books? Or books *about* them?"

"If you are referring to the *Koran*, Frog, I don't know Arabic; and if you mean the *Mahab*—whatever it is, I don't know Sanskrit!"

"They've all been translated into English! . . . Ever read Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*? Or Tavernier? Or Bernier? Or Roe? . . . Well, in a way, it doesn't surprise me; but the India Office really should tell you fellows what books dealing with 'India' you ought to read . . . I always travel with a pocket copy of Arnold. . . ."

An unquittable perverseness piqued by a sense of being again hopelessly in the wrong, caused a flare of hostility to the three French names; and for it I was smitten hip and thigh. He said that the French knew "their bit of India inside out, which was something few of us did"; Tavernier liked English beer, and stated in writing that we English were underpaid; *he* was easily the greatest traveller of the seventeenth century; and so on.

I then hit the big drum of Personal Opinion quite a number of resounding welts. I retorted that we were still underpaid, considering what a damn' rotten country India was and our superlative worth to Hindustan. I said, too, that India would not be what she was if it had not been for us; that the French did nothing for her; that Hinduism was a mass of debased superstitions for which no clean-minded white man could have any use; and that if I read any books at all on India I should read up-to-date ones—and certainly not French ones. "I'm going to bed!" rounded off the peroration.

Frog continued serenely. He admitted that we had developed the country in an economic sense; we had also abolished plague; but, by way of balancing things, we had killed Indian

## *Indian Mosaic*

art and were doing our best to dynamite Indian ethics. All of which, of course, is as true as the sacred Evangel.

"As for being what you call 'up to date,'" he continued, "India doesn't recognize dates! The people those old traveler fellows wrote about are still in Hindustan. In the case of her Kings—we call them 'Princes'—the power is gone, naturally. But if we were to clear out I believe that India would find herself back in something resembling a Great Mogul *régime* in no time! The Mohammedan faith is a fighter's faith, and it has fifty-seven million followers inside India, and Afghanistan sitting on the back door-step."

I pointed out that there were three hundred millions of Hindus watching them. But he would have none of it. He said that the Hindu fighting races were only a small minority of the Hindu total, and that we had taught the Hindu masses to forget the use of arms. In which, again, he was perfectly right, although the Hindu character reflects the Hindu faith, just as the Mohammedan's character reflects his; and the Hindu faith being a distinctly 'feminine' faith—gentle, submissive, and not so mystical as people make out—the Hindu peasant doesn't really care who rules India. In fact, so long as he is left in peace to plough and reap and worship God in his own way, that is all he asks. Patriotism, as we know it, is an unknown quantity to him. It is un-Hindu, for the Hindu is a universologist. But the Mohammedan does not think along these lines. By reason of his faith, he is masculine, acquisitive, power-loving, and a born opportunist. He is also, be it said, a great gentleman, a fine organizer, and a staunch ally. And he loves art for art's sake. Yet, except for my preferred Indian hero, Akbar the Great—who was really not an Indian at all, being the son of a Chagtai Turk and a Persian mother—the greatest of India's *non-tyrant* kings have been Hindus. The rule of the Great Moguls (or Mongols) was essentially the rule of the sword. Swift action and sure vengeance. On the other hand, in the whole of

## *Adieu, Frog!*

Indian history there is no recorded instance of a place of worship belonging to another faith having been desecrated, demolished, or appropriated by a Hindu conqueror; and, with one exception, I believe that no Hindu conqueror ever ordered a wholesale slaughter for slaughter's sake. . . .

"I think it's extraordinary that you Indian Army fellows aren't *made* to study Indian history," ended up Frog.

Standing by the door of his tent, I asked, humbly, for a loan of the pocket edition of *The Light of Asia*.

Before dawn I had read it from cover to cover. It set moving in me slow wheels of Thought. Mill-wheels.

. . . Pity and need  
Make all flesh kin    There is no caste in blood,  
Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears,  
Which trickle salt with all . . .

So that was Buddhism!

For a long time I lay staring up at the stars. It seemed impossible that a faith so beautiful and gentle should practically have vanished from India. But it was so. A useful preface had also told me that: "Buddha, by denying the authority of the Hindu Scriptures and the existence of the human soul placed himself in open opposition to orthodox ritual Hinduism and its Pantheon." I admired him for it. "It is a beautiful, beautiful faith," I kept repeating under my breath. The final annihilation that the preface assured me it taught, was outside my calculations in those days; it was the Rule of Life, the sovereignty of compassion which it enjoined, that held me. It seemed as lofty as anything in the Bible; and, lying there listening to a hyena cracking bones, I even decided that it was more comfortingly near and human.

The spiritual beauty of the poem had lighted up my ignorance as the beam of a searchlight lights up drifting clouds, and, dazzled by the aggressive white splendour, just about cock-crow I surprisingly remembered my prayers.

## XXI

### *The Art of Sociability*

The bond of human society is reason and speech.

CICERO, *De Officiis*

THE next day I went riding with Haji Abdulla. Frog was to have gone with us, but he said he had decided to go quail-shooting instead. . . . My last night's experiences had awakened in me a new purpose: I would observe the daily life of the people, and, when necessary, ask to be told about what I did not understand.

Our way to the open country lay through the village, and very soon we passed some skeleton-like cattle standing in a tumble-down byre, too weak, it seemed, even to blink their fly-ringed eyes; carrion crows were hopping in a sideways awkwardness along the sharply salient vertebræ. My first impulse was to make an indignant comment to my companion; but, remembering the brand-new purpose, I asked instead why they were so thin.

"There is a famine in the land—as your Honour knows," commented Haji Abdulla dryly.

I did not know; and he knew I did not know. The only thing I did know about "the land" was that, having been asked to this place to shoot, in two days I had shot nothing. I had never seen a famine-stricken country, nor read about one, save in the Old Testament, which had always been 'reading' and never 'reality' to me. The idea that the hollowness of the men's eyes, which I had of course at once remarked, was actually due to starvation, and not to phthisis or sexual causes, staggered me somewhat; and, to stifle a nascent sense of shame, I assured myself that I would be quite safe in reducing an unpleasant generalization to a 50

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per cent. basis. I had much to learn. . . . Sixty times in her history India has known famine. A year later I read Macaulay's terrible description of the famine of 1770, when the river Hooghly and the streets of Calcutta were choked up with the dead, and for twenty years after one-third of Bengal lay silent and desolate. Things are different to-day; but in the year that Frog and I were on that shooting-trip there was much suffering in some parts of India, and, hearing a little of it, I remembered a Mohammedan prayer which the Mirza had told me of when we were discussing the *Bagh-o-Bahar*:

When I had no teeth, then Thou gavest milk;  
O Thou who gavest teeth, wilt Thou not give food?

I asked the *haji* what was being done to relieve the distress of these negligible people. He informed me gloomily that the *Sirkar* (Government) had sent to his district a trainload of grain, and that other trains would follow shortly. He himself had given five thousand rupees to a relief fund.

Perhaps to change the subject, he then told me that his young son was to be circumcised that afternoon. Would I be pleased to come to the supper he was giving in honour of his son after the ceremony?

Instant acceptance of a rather perfunctorily proffered invitation started a disconnected dissertation on *tamashas* in general. . . . "It is the undoubtedly stupid custom of us Indians to give such entertainments," he ended sardonically.

I looked at a near-by group of startlingly thin villagers, clad in only a loincloth and turban—clean garments, but old and coarse.

"Surely those people don't give entertainments?"

"Without doubt they do, sahib! They are simple people, and it takes very little to make them happy. I might even say they are always happy. I have known one of them happy to die of hunger through giving to his cow the grain that was intended for his own nourishing."

## Indian Mosaic

“ ‘Contented’ you mean? ” To me those villagers seemed broken-spirited to the point of stupidity.

He shook his head and roused his pony to an amble.

“No; they are happy. They think their gods are pleased with them. They are Hindus, and therefore believe that their gods move among them—sometimes visible, sometimes invisible. It is very primitive.”

I asked him what the *main difference* was between them and his own Mohammedan people—apart from the fact that they did not believe in the Prophet and the Koran.

“We believe that a man’s circumstances in life—his *nusseeb*,<sup>1</sup> or destiny—is ordained by Allah. ‘His fate is written upon his forehead,’ we say. All that happens to him is ‘kismet’—God’s will. Our faith does not allow us to make or paint an image of any living creature: the Hindus make images and worship them. They believe that their *karma*, or lot in life, is the result of their deeds in other existences.” He shrugged. “As if God would wish any man to live twice!”

“Buddhism, also, teaches reincarnation.” (I was proud of my new knowledge.)

“Buddhism is a religion for women and old men, sahib; not for soldiers!” He fingered a gold watch-chain.

I remained silent. In those poor, ill-roofed houses, tumble-down byres, and bony cattle, whose patience and submissiveness seemed to be reflected in their equally bony owners, I saw an idolatrous community of beggars living in a primitive squalor and misery that connoted “bugs, fleas, moths, and beetles.” Parenthetically, I may remark that in those days I never travelled without a tin of insecticide. But I never used it. The humblest Hindu village home is scrupulously clean; a caste Hindu housewife will not cook without first praying and bathing. . . .

Of all men the Hindu may, I think, be said to be

<sup>1</sup> *Nusseeb* and *kismet* are the same

## *The Art of Sociability*

“captain of his soul.” He regards himself as the actual maker of a better, and therefore less suffering, ‘himself,’ who will live in another mortal existence. He does not worship the images in his temples or sacred groves any more than Catholics worship the images in their churches; he worships the particular aspect of God which those things represent for him. The cow, for instance, stands for spiritual virtue, expecting nothing and giving all—a symbolism that seems no more ridiculous than making a dove represent the Holy Ghost. His own oneness with Brahman—The All—is as real to the Hindu as his own rather frail body; and, seeing God in everything, he transmutes the base metals of Trial and Poverty into the gold of salvation. Even though ritualistic Hinduism in many of its aspects is debased, and most of its liturgies therefore wailing denunciations of a priesthood that has been unfaithful to its trust, the fact remains that it has for foundation the Hindu philosophy of the Vedas and the *Upanishads*, than which, in its essentials, nothing higher has ever been thought out by the mind of man. In that sense and for that reason ritual Hinduism is a live faith. For the poorest Hindu *Dharma*—the ethical law—is as much and as easily to be obeyed as the rule of the road is with us. The Hindu peasants’ sobriety, kindliness, and tranquil contentment are the logical outcome of a consistent adherence to a faith untampered with by faiths less faithful. Therefore it seems to me that, if there is such a thing as eternal damnation, the man or men who for the furthering of some fleeting political creed would destroy beliefs that have comforted a just and a lovable people through unknown millenniums will richly deserve to find it.

Many a time as I gossiped with the village elders at sunset—they call it the ‘cow-dust hour’—watching the cattle cross the level landscape and move sedately between the mud walls of the clustered houses, a golden smoke around their hooves and a golden mist above their packed and clicking horns, the



## *Indian Mosaic*

peace and tranquillity of the scene struck even me, the Philistine, as being idyllic to the point of unreality. Sitting there listening to the folk-lore stories I sometimes got them to tell, or to the high-pitched, wavering songs one of them could generally be induced to sing, it seemed impossible that such Arcadian simplicity and Golden Age friendliness could exist in the alert and efficient world to which I was so fortunate to belong. I looked upon the dignified quietness of those simple men—no women were ever present—as merely an exhibition of ‘the usual Indian hypocrisy,’ or as a temporary paralysis of primitive traits and activities, caused by the presence of a representative of a higher order of things. Yet, whether that same curiously fragrant dust lay hot and light under the relentless summer sun, or whether it lay cold and heavy beneath my feet in the winters of the Punjab and the North-west, my welcome had always the same gentle heartiness. In summer they waved a palm-leaf fan above my head and brought me offerings of fruit and buttermilk; in winter they gave me the warmest place by their fire. Profound and flattering was their belief in the justice and honour of a *sahib*; childlike their love and respect for the *Sirkar*—the Government that was their ‘father and mother.’ “If our case be judged by a *sahib* we shall be happy, whatever his decision,” they would say, after recounting some hopelessly intricate law-case into which they had plunged with all the litigious joy of the Indian. “But if our case be judged by a *kala admi* [a black man] we shall not get such justice.” Partly because of this wide trustfulness, and partly because of their firm belief in faithfully worshipped gods, they had, obviously, too little care for the morrow. Still, I was able to credit them with certain compensatory virtues: they loved their land and their families, and they hated the moneylenders; they venerated old age, and they cared for their cattle. According to Hindu legend, *Surabhi* the cow was one of the fourteen products obtained by *Siva* from his

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churning of the primeval ocean. Her name means 'Boon-giver,' and great is the reverence paid to her descendants.

Such was the "... placid, pathetic contentment ... of 95 per cent. of the people. ..."

The supper at the *haji's* house was an elaborate affair.

On a small raised platform of mud bricks built round a tree in the middle of the courtyard was stationed the orchestra—a big drum, a kettle-drum, a cornet, and the native equivalent of a clarinet. The zeal and disunited determination of the players that none should miss hearing them ought to have atoned for the excruciating sounds. The only noticeable rhythm—and it was very noticeable—was the dull and quite independent thudding of the bigger drum, of which, fortunately, one side was holed and the other saggy.

Frog and I were received with a feverish rendering of some odd bars of *God save the King*, which incontinently drifted into *Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do*. Permutations and combinations of those airs and an Indianized version of *Home, Sweet Home*, were pumped and thumped during the two immortal hours during which we sat cross-legged among a couple of hundred guests.

With ceremonious courtesy we were conducted to a small table laid with two forks and two spoons. My newly-born intention to take an amiable interest in everything and everybody Indian was badly strained when, without consulting me, my companion announced to our host that we would prefer to sit on the floor and eat with our fingers. A whispered colloquy secured me a spoon on the condition that I used it with my left hand—the left hand being considered the unclean hand by both Mohammedans and Hindus—and swore to dabble the fingers of my other hand a few times in the rice and gravy. Frog was a stickler for that sort of etiquette.

The food was delicious, though every dish swam in butter.

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There were richly spiced stews of tender goat's meat mixed with shreds of broiled onions; great dishes of mutton and chicken curry, and small mountains of snowy rice, each grain light, dry, and separate as only Indians seem able to make them; spiced kid's flesh with thick, rich gravy; and two kinds of *kababs*—succulent golden-brown little balls of minced and spiced meat, or entire morsels, cooked on spits. The Indian dislikes eating the fat of meat, and every particle of it had been carefully removed. With all these dishes piping-hot dry or buttered *chupattees*—soft, flat, round cakes of unleavened bread—were served.

After the meat course came tarts with a heavy, sugary cream made from the skimmings of continuously boiled milk, our Western cream being considered wasteful and less pleasing. There were also little coloured glasses filled with curds, and a kind of highly sweetened porridge tasting strongly of nutmeg. For sweets we had *jellabis* (batter cakes fried in butter and sugar), cream toffee covered with silver leaf, and dry *hulwa* or *luddu* cakes, consisting of flour and sugar with a little melted butter to bind them together.

A performance by four young nautch-girls followed the feast. The most interesting thing about a form of entertainment that at no time interested me very much was the astonishing way in which they made their features, their fingers, and even their great toes share in their body movements. They were also apparently able to dislocate their necks at will: keeping their small shoulders absolutely steady and their faces rigidly perpendicular, so to speak, they could jerk their heads several inches to the left or right of their normal axes, and even turn them round and look behind them, as parrots do. The *haji* informed me off-handedly that a certain "not very painful operation" was performed on them during early childhood.

Once, in the dark eyes of one of them I saw a look that

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vividly recalled a memory of somebody else. But it was gone like a flash.

The strident talk, the heat of the room, the sickening mixture of odours—incense, rose-water, and pungent Indian tobacco—made me bless the etiquette that at last required us to ask permission to leave.

Our host was only induced to relinquish his expressed intention to accompany us part of the way upon the condition that we consented to his sending an escort consisting of the band—in action—and a few of his friends. But before we left he showed us in his stables two leopard cubs who had a she-goat as foster-mother. Looking down at those spotted kittens, I found it difficult to realize that each of them was an infant Death.

On another shooting expedition I came across a very different case of foster-motherhood. A native had captured a wolf-child. The man informed me that he expected to get "five rupees reward from the missionary-sahib for bringing this little female animal to Jesus."

Squatting, his captive moved its head quickly from side to side, obviously very frightened. Occasionally it would tear at the grass rope tied about its waist and peer through a tangle of coarse black hair. Its general physical development was that of a child of about ten years of age. Several times it crawled on all fours to the extent of the rope, and then, feeling the check, started to mew and snarl, but not very loudly. Caked with dirt, there were pads of hard skin on its hands, knees, and the dorsal surfaces of its feet that recalled the pads on a camel's knees. The prognathous jaw, the sunken eyes under the low, sloping forehead, and the large, loose-lipped mouth gave it a repulsive resemblance to a half-human monkey, and made suddenly clear to me the reason for the belief that Hanuman, the monkey-headed god who helped to rescue Queen Sita from the demon king of Lanka (Ceylon), and whose name means 'Long-jaw,' was

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not really a monkey at all, but a king of Sinhalese aborigines who brought his people to the aid of King Rama.

“What does it eat?”

“Birds or raw flesh; would the sahib like to see it eat?”

A dead king-crow was fished out of a bag and thrown down. The creature eyed it with its head on one side, but made no attempt to devour it.

“*Khao!*” (“Eat!”) The shikaree thrust at it with his foot, and the child scrambled sideways.

Evidently the wretched girl thought her captor had designs on the dead king-crow, for at once it was seized and conveyed to an again invisible mouth and there torn in half, the eating process being rapid and audible. One of the long white tail-feathers of the bird bobbed and jerked as it stuck out sideways between the quick-gnashing teeth.

The well-content capturer of this monstrosity said he had found it in a leopard pit and that it had probably been stolen from its mother's lap when she had fallen asleep. “A prowling she-wolf comes and licks the woman's hands lightly with its soft warm tongue until they fall apart. . . .” Such cleverness, if that is really what happens, seems to connote something more than mere instinct in the she-wolf. I think it is probable that these wolf-children—who, I gathered, are usually females—are unwanted girl-babies left in the jungle to die.

As I stood there, looking and listening, there came to me a vision of this demented half-animal creature—so pathetically incapable of reasoning, so utterly miserable, and so permanently unhuman—forced to wear a print frock and locked up alone at nights. I seemed to see it breaking its heart; pining to death for a freedom harmless to man and in which it had found all that it needed, and certainly more than our world would give it, of happiness. . . . And for five rupees . . .

It is strange how often the conduct of ‘soulless’ animals puts to shame the behaviour of the Lords of Creation.

## XXII

### *Spotted Death*

It is very strange, and very melancholy, that the paucity of human pleasures should persuade us ever to call hunting one of them.

SAMUEL JOHNSON *Miscellaneous*

#### SUNSET.

At the edge of a jungle glade stands a tree that is slightly taller than the rest. In the open, a few yards from it, is a ridiculously inadequate-looking little goat, bleating mournfully as it circles a peg, straining a rope to tautness. Squatting uncomfortably on a leafy platform in a forked branch twelve feet above the goat is the motionless figure of a man in khaki, staring intently into the shadows.

My tree; my goat; myself. Half a mile away Frog is in a similar setting. Our all-night vigil has just started. No smoking; not a move. The mosquitoes must be allowed to dine in peace. In silence our rifles were handed up to us. Silently the shikaree and mahout salaamed; and ponderously and almost silently the great mass of elephant moved away. Men and beast merged into the surrounding grey of the tree-trunks.

Sitting askew, half-left towards my bait, I examined meditatively a double-barrelled 500 whose breech lay comfortably heavy on my thigh. Along the engraved centre rib from breech-lock to foresight was pasted a narrow strip of white paper; without some such gadget it would be impossible to see the sight-bead in the hours of darkness before moon-rise. For nearly an hour the bleating below me continued uninterruptedly. The excited chatter of some monkeys was unnoticed by the tethered sacrifice to a young man's pleasure; but the young man himself pricked mosquito-bitten

## Indian Mosaic

ears. The monkey people hate the leopard, for, unlike the tiger, he is a tree-climber. . . .

How many times all that happened!

The first occasion on which I found myself looking into the eyes of a free panther had a unique unpleasantness. Darkness had fallen with the suddenness that marks the coming of an Indian night. The goat had become invisible and silent. A sambhur stag belled. Ages later a quick scuttling told of a passing pig or one of the smaller deer. Now and again I heard the far-away howling of jackals; not for them the gloom of that dangerous interior! Then came the Silence. Except for the quietness of the dead, I know of no stillness that is as full of mystery or as impressive as that of the jungle by night. It can literally be felt. Even the shrill note of the mosquitoes zooming into one's ear seems loud enough to warn any near-by quarry.

Not being a practised big-game hunter, I told myself that if I listened with concentrated attention I would be certain to hear Spots coming: was not the ground littered with crackly dead leaves and even cracklier twigs? . . . Hour after hour crawled by. The dew began to drip from the branches, the impact of each drop as it hit the leaves sounding like the crack of a small whip. But nothing stirred. A few fireflies inspected the clearing, and a frog croaked. Then, for a space of minutes even those mitigations were not. Slowly the moon came up, heralded by the faintest of bluish mistinesses.

A quavering bleat brought my gaze to earth.

Down there in the darkness were two balls of green fire.

At the infinitesimal click of the safety-catch the green fires instantly went out. The tiger or panther, whichever it was, had gone. But the *unbelievable* quietness of its coming . . . and its going!

Suddenly came an agonizing cramp. If all the tigers in Bengal had been there I could not have remained still. As noiselessly as possible the offending leg was thrust

## *Spotted Death*

forward; but the pain increased and the usual contortions ensued. A supporting hand slipped off the edge of the *machan*, I lost my balance, pitched sideways, and, dropping by noisy stages through intervening branches, fell to the ground.

They say that a special Providence watches over children and fools. Nothing was broken save the glass of my wrist-watch; my rifle did not go off.

I sat a moment, staring dazedly at the goat. Then, just as suddenly as one switches on the electric light, the twin balefires blazed up again. So, I think, must the sun have looked to Nero through his emerald.

The spectacle induced an acrobatic agility. Between the taking of two breaths I had reviewed, classified, and docketed all the possibilities of action. An unpleasant vision of a certain half-caste's death kept me immobile. Also, the tree-trunk was unclimbably big and smooth. I had three alternatives: I could shoot, and risk only wounding the beast; I could wait till it charged, and then let drive; or I could wait and see whether it would go away. With extraordinary piety I decided on the last.

Some optimist who had certainly never shared darkness with a thwarted panther, wrote that "*Fear is the Mother of Safety and the Father of Courage.*" It is neither. Did I face the situation with a sense of security and thrill of satisfaction? I did not. I yearned, sickeningly, to be up a tree. My skin prickled and my heart thumped. Dry-mouthed, I stared at spotted death, and there was no virtue in me. . . . But fear is a form of mental paralysis which the mind can be made to overcome. "Remain motionless! Keep on staring at it! It will clear off," urged Body. "Get behind the tree and shoot!" retorted Mind. All this within two seconds.

The double report of the 500 brought some surprising results: the goat lay down; the panther disappeared; and I walked after it.

Probably a fear of losing my way would sooner or later



## *Indian Mosaic*

have ended a fool chase; actually, it was two shots from Frog's direction and the instant outbreak of a hellish uproar that stopped me. A whole pack of panthers seemed to be having an all-in clawing-match somewhere. Evidently Frog had been lucky. . . . Several more shots; and then silence. A few moments later came a trilling blast on a whistle.

The return of the elephant found me pondering the mentality of goats. Do what I would, my wretched bait refused to remain near me. Perhaps its instinct told it that a biped who inflicted hours of torture at the end of a rope was more to be avoided than a quadrupedal death that killed swiftly.

"Go to the other sahib—quickly!"

As I clambered on to the pad the mahout said it was not possible to go quickly, owing to the difficulties of the way. To which he added acidly "*Shaitan kī betī!*" ("Daughter of Satan!") The remark was addressed to the long-suffering goat as he knotted its tether rope to one of the howdah rings.

"Why should such a 'nothing' have been bothered about?" he grumbled under his breath.

The denseness of the jungle and a clouded moon meant slow progress. How the elephant found its way at all, is a mystery; elephants never seem to be looking where they are going, and from my elevated perch on the pad no trace of any track was visible; only centuries of bewilderingly similar tree-trunks, and they but dimly.

The body of a big male panther was stretched out directly under Frog's *machan*. It seems that his first shot had hit its spine, and it had tried to climb up at him. The bole was white with claw marks. The beast, being, of course, directly below him and invisible from where he was sitting, he had had to stand erect and shoot through the floor of a very frail perch.

But Frog could manage most things.

## XXIII

### *The British Officer in India*

Let him avoid . . . women.

*The Code of Manu*

A SLOWLY widening acquaintance with the native mind brought the realization that an Indian is seldom wrong when it comes to judging a white man. An Oxford accent and an old school tie cannot deceive him; he reads us like a primer. It was unpleasant to have to admit it, but the fact remained. Himself courteous by nature, he hates discourtesy, and if a man is not a 'pukka' sahib<sup>1</sup> he despises him. If you asked him to define a sahib he would say, "A real sahib is a personally clean white man who gives me a square deal; who is courageous; a sportsman; and a respecter of religion, women, and the poor." One Hindustani word, in short, sums up the late Cardinal Newman's two-page definition of a gentleman.

Educated Europeans who know less about India than they do about China—which reduces their knowledge to the decimal regions—picture the British Indian Army Officer as a servant-beating autocrat who bullies his men, keeps a *corps de ballet* of nautch-girls, and spends every summer in hill-stations peopled by nymphomaniac descendants of Potiphar's wife.

Of all the nonsense!

His men look upon him as a sort of sporting elder brother with semi-divine powers; that is all. In reality, of course, it is a pretty big 'all,' for his are the titles, *Ma-Bap* (Father and Mother), *Khudāwund* (Master of the world), *Huzoor* (The Presence), and *Gharib Parwar* (Cherisher of the Poor). That sort of thing takes a bit of living up to, I

<sup>1</sup> 'Pukka' is an elastic word, which can mean 'thorough,' 'ripened,' or 'real.'

## *Indian Mosaic*

suppose, but between the Indian Army officer and his men there is the helpful triple bond of good-fellowship, respect, and mutual affection. To know a good Indian is to love him; that has been my experience. But, even so, he is always an explosive mixture of child and tiger. His love is passionate, his hate tigerish. No man of the fighting races would ever allow himself to be bullied. A servant would simply disappear.

So the regiment—a little people ruled over by a kinglet wearing a crown and one star<sup>1</sup>—work and play together, officers and men hoping that the day will soon come when they will find themselves together on active service—a hope that in my own case was realized several times.

There is, in short, a far closer comradeship than is possible in the British Service, though I knew I.A. officers who were not liked by Indians. It is all a matter of compatibility; of suitability of temperament.

“A *corps de ballet* of nautch-girls!”

The Indian nautch-girl is guarded by a dragon, like the golden apples of the Hesperides. Occasionally one saw them at official nautches—decorous, dreary affairs; one rarely met them to talk to. Mostly, when they are spoken to they giggle, because they have nothing to say: it is their custom to let their supple bodies express their thoughts—or what passes for them.

Many of these young “Slaves of the gods” were fascinating, all of them were small and had golden-coloured skin, slim ankles, and generally, but by no means always, delicate hands and feet. Their training, which is strenuous and starts at childhood, is carried out daily, without a break, during the two mystic hours before dawn. Uncanny is the intelligence of their eyes: they almost talk! They do talk. . . . This astonishing ‘liveness’ of the eyes, added to a courteous

<sup>1</sup> The rank-badges of a Lieutenant-Colonel.

## *The British Officer in India*

gentleness and an apparent blank indifference to man, makes these incredibly supple young creatures accomplished mistresses of the art of suggestion without vulgarity.

I once asked one of them why they always wore their shiny black hair parted down the middle and combed back. Why was it never curled or worn in ringlets?

For some moments she fingered in silence her single long plait adorned with scented white flowers and golden ornaments, letting her eyes chatter invitations at me. Whatever intriguing secret I was going to be told seemed to take a lot of telling.

"Because it is *dustoor* [custom]," she said at length, and giggled.

They dance six times a day before the temple idol, if they are temple, and not city, dancers; and always they wear red garments, red being the colour of the great god Siva, one of whose many titles is "The King of the Dance and Lord of the Mystic Spiral."

Not for us is the beauty and sensual grace of the *nauchi*; nor for her our frank coldness and utter incompatibility.

In one of my diaries I have notes of a conversation with an I.M.S. colonel. He was civil surgeon of a big station, and had an extensive private practice among the Indian residents. After remarking, tersely enough, that woman is a greater necessity in a man's life in the East, he said:

"One reason why the Indians respect the Army fellow is because he keeps clear of their women. No other conquering race before us has done that. That is why the staunchest supporters of the British rule are the Indian women. . . . I know it to be so. . . . Our Government has got to thank one hundred and fifty million Indian wives—to whose existence we never give a thought—for the fact that the governing of this blessed country hasn't proved damn' sight more difficult than it has! The Indian husband is a henpecked bird; the 'Woman Behind the Purdah' exerts an enormous influence

## *Indian Mosaic*

in Indian politics. It isn't so marked in Burma, where there is no *purdah* system. . . . When I was in Mandalay . . . I'll tell you something: The other name of the Indian woman is 'Fidelity!'"

But it is the British doctor in India, far more than we soldiers, who has earned the gratitude and respect of the Indian people.

It is a commonplace in the East that alcohol drunk before sundown spells 'liver.' It also spells 'sexual anarchy.' Therefore it is that the Indian Army, with whom physical fitness is both an essential and a fetish, for the most part drinks copiously of soft beverages until nightfall. Of all alcoholic drinks the most perfect is the first whisky and soda of the day, taken with a savouring slowness at sunset. Like a king in procession, there is no equal among those that follow.

I learned all about the connexion that exists between alcohol and the 'sex anarchy' business through taking a wineglassful of iced Schnapps one sultry afternoon in Bareilly. The monsoon had just broken, and it had been raining for a week. No exercise of any kind had been possible during seven long days, and in consequence I felt depressed and restless. Suddenly the thought of Hollands-and-ice shot into my mind like a heaven-sent inspiration. I knew it to be a good and wholesome drink, for I used to take a port-glass of it poured over cracked ice after tennis or polo.

"Alcohol," I said on that hideous occasion, "will certainly raise my spirits!"

It raised Hell. . . .

That evening's experience decided me to come more out of my shell, and a few days later I gave my first tea-party in my bungalow. I invited the prettiest women in the station. . . . But not in *Indian Mosaic* will I chronicle the disaster that dissolved a gracious gathering. . . .

In India we fight the sex-urge with work and play. There

## *The British Officer in India*

is no better sedative than going to bed physically tired. There come moments, of course, when one dreams of things that cannot be, and then trouble may start. My own attempts to dodge it led me to *Alice in Wonderland* and the superlative joys of night-time rides. Whisky—one of my ponies—used to whinny when I went to saddle him by the light of a lamp. To say that he did not clearly mean “Good for you, for thinking of this!” would be absurd.

But I had another and more curious ‘antidote.’ I discovered, while stationed on the Frontier, that the thought of the sea was a sedative. If I concentrated I imagined I could sniff the ozone. And so, baking in the oven that is the Northwest Frontier in August, I heard the long-drawn seethe of ebbing tides and felt the drift of the salt sea-mist. Sometimes She would come into the picture, and we would sit hand-in-hand, listening to the waves. . . .

Idiotie?

There is something sternly cold and pure about the thought of our Northern seas.

## XXIV

### *My Babu Friend*

In faith, he is a worthy gentleman,  
Exceedingly well read.

SHAKESPEARE, *Henry IV*

WE of the Indian Army owe to a patient and lovable people a pleasant career, a good salary, and an adequate pension. But, though we live the best years of our life among them, we seldom realize the fact. After a quarter of a century or so of service we most of us come home and do not leave behind us a single close Indian friend. Retired officers of Indian regiments get letters from their Indian officers; I know that. All who have been in authority get letters from Indian friends; but not *intimate* letters, I dare to say. Our friendships with Indians are never 'intimate' in the usual sense of that word. "There are too many fundamental differences in our natures and our outlooks," is the stock reason given for this state of affairs. It is, of course, a peculiarly blatant truism.

In extenuation of our failure to make deep Indian friendships it might be urged that to live (with a small number of one's own kind) in a world swarming with agate-eyed beings who have the same features and common, unmusical voice, and who think and talk about the same things in the same way, and act in the same way, every day and all day, is surely a state of affairs that would almost excuse misanthropy.

That is how Indians in the mass appeared to me about this time. Those of them with whom I became friendly exhibited a strange reluctance to talk about themselves. They seemed to be parthogenetic beings, with therefore no relatives. Conversationally they had but three strings to their bow:

## *My Babu Friend*

money, food, and, if they belonged to the military world, sport. Useful conversational side-lines were my own affairs, my parents, and my male relatives. Occasionally an Indian might mention to me that a mutual Indian acquaintance had a father or a brother; never that he had a mother or a sister.

No reference was ever made to the actual speaker's home-life. Not unnaturally I did not speak of *my* home—the key to the fortress of most men's reserve. To me—a Brobdingnagian in Lilliput, in my own estimation—it seemed only natural that my Indian companion for the moment should exhibit a genuine awe when I spoke of my country in terms of its police, public transport, and amusements. I was neither elated nor interested in the awe. It was Britain's due. In the sports we played together I could never quite free my mind from an impression that I was taking part in them, not so much because I liked it, as because I felt for various reasons I *ought* to be there; and that they were playing, not so much because the game *per se* appealed to them, as because in playing it they felt they were being more like us and that I would appreciate the effort. I was all wrong, of course, but that is how I thought. In later years I discovered that the pass-key to the Indian's hidden self is an intelligent interest in his view of God and Life. I do not mean by that that I came to understand those deep things as he understood them; or that such of them as I felt I did understand, I understood to the degree that he understood them; that would be like comparing a courageous seaside bather with a deep-sea diver. I knew that I could never grasp with his sureness beliefs that his ancestors had held for thousands of years. . . .

“On the path on which their fathers and grandfathers have walked, on that path of good men let him walk, and he will not go wrong,” said Manu, several thousand years ago. What I did find was, that if I showed a sincere interest in his religious beliefs, and discussed mine, at once a door that had



## *Indian Mosaic*

been closed between us seemed to open, and we were contented sharers of a jealously guarded secret garden.

A frequent visitor to my bungalow in Bareilly was an elderly Brahmin named Balmokund. He liked to come to tea—in which he was unorthodox—to give me “some occasional instruction on Hindu matters.” Like many Indians, he had a passion for having his photograph taken, and when leaving always inquired whether I still had my camera. His name means “Blessed Child,” and it was appropriate to him.

Brahmins and women, the Vedas and the gods, were his favourite topics. Obviously he was rightly proud of his caste, though, like all Brahmins, he never said so. But he strongly disapproved of the temple priests; they mixed far too much in politics, money-getting, and intrigue, he said. . . . “But who am I to say these things?” That was a phrase he frequently used. Of the other religions he thought tolerantly. It was, he said, a question of distance from God, not of difference in beliefs. He maintained that the spiritual concept of Christianity, a faith for which he had a great reverence, was essentially the same as that of Hinduism. I saw, then, no foundation for his point of view; but to-day I imagine that he had in mind—for he knew, well, the principles of the Christian faith—our Lord’s words, “I and the Father are One.” These words, for a Hindu, embody the central Vedic teaching of the oneness of man with God. I was more interested in the Hindu-Mohammedan antagonism that was always breaking out on the slightest provocation, and I asked him whether he did not think that if the Hindus, who so very much outnumber the Mohammedans, were to adopt a less pacific attitude the Mohammedans would leave them more alone?

“We believe that the correct attitude for us is that which is laid down in our sacred books: ‘Even as the tree shades

## *My Babu Friend*

him who lays an axe to its roots, so shall a man be forbearing with his enemy.' There are many creeds, but only one fundamental belief." He paused.

"Perhaps, sir, one day a renewed Hinduism will become the religion of the world!"

"We Christians believe that our religion will become that! Your Hindu idea that people who have loved one another in this life will not meet again in the next world is repugnant to us."

"We merely say, sir, that people will meet again in future incarnations; and, although they may not remember that they once loved one another, such meetings will be free from any past unpleasantness that may have taken place. According to science, our bodies are completely renewed at the end of every seven years; therefore if we love some one for twenty-one years we have loved three different persons, two of whom have passed away!"

His kindly nature and large-minded tolerance were eloquent missionaries. Perhaps he sensed my sympathy towards Hinduism and wished to warn me against "the ritualistic muddle that is our modern orthodox Hindu faith." Once, when I told him that riding along the river-bank I had seen three Aghoras—members of a nearly extinct sect who eat human corpses and worship a goddess of famine—devouring horrible things near a quenched funeral pyre, he groaned aloud, and, invoking the deity, asked nobody in particular why it was that India had no dominating Brahmin personality in the spiritual domain. It made him terribly depressed, he said. . . . Could he have a whisky and soda?

One day, observing that he was regarding the miniature on my table, I mentioned that it was a picture of somebody whom I did not know and which I had come upon by chance. He expressed no curiosity, but remarked that I was not to think that anything he had said about the modern Hindu's neglect of the Vedas in any way applied to the Indian

## *Indian Mosaic*

woman. "They disapprove of change," he said, "for they are faithful to the ancient traditions."

The Hindus believe in a sacramental and indissoluble marriage, and many of their descriptions of the love of husband and wife are very beautiful:

He is Patience, she is Peace; he is Will, she is Wish; he is Music, she is Note; he is Owner, she is Wealth. . . .

At one Hindu wedding small artificial trees were carried in procession, decorated with paper flowers, for the givers of the feast were poor. Had the parties been wealthy, the trees would have been made of gold and have had their leaves and branches encrusted with gems. They resembled our Christmas trees, both in appearance and in their signification (as I was told) of happiness and prosperity.

"It is declared in our sacred books," said Balmokund one day, "that 'good women should be honoured and worshipped like the gods themselves. . . . By the virtue of the soul-power of the true women the three worlds are upheld.' But of what use are 12,000 wives to any man? Yet we had a king who had that number; and in the zenana of the Emperor Shah Jehan there were 30,000 women. I tell you, sir, that we have a proverb '*Do bahen, ek shaitān*,' which means 'Two sisters married to the same husband are equal to one devil.' A thousand wives would be a far more hellish business, apart from budgetary difficulty."

"Is it true that suttee still occurs in India, Balmokund?"

"Sir, I have personally seen a woman burn herself by setting fire to a small house made of grass and reeds. She had the head of her dead husband upon her lap. The headman of the village explained that it was an accident, because her grief had driven her mad and she had thrown down a lamp. . . . In all the world there are no women as faithful as our women!"

He then propounded an astonishing theory. He said:

## *My Babu Friend*

"First, I shall remark that suttee means purity and is one of the many names of the goddess Kali, who most decidedly represents the consuming female principle, for she is the *shakti* [female] half of Siva, the destroyer, who is her husband. On a certain occasion, a legend says, to purify herself from anger, she gave herself to the flaming embrace of Agni, the god of fire.

"We Brahmins did not invent suttee. Most certainly not! Suttee is not even mentioned in the Vedas. In one of them the departure of the widow from her husband's funeral pyre to return to her home is most specifically alluded to. There are those who say that the suttee rite was sexual in origin, and there is a story which relates that a certain king, because he had insulted a Brahmin ascetic, became an ogre and wandered in the jungle. There he came upon a man and his wife clasped in each other's arms. The woman implored him to leave them alone. But the madman insisted most brutally upon killing her husband; whereupon the woman's tears turned to drops of fire which set light to the forest, and she cast herself into the flames!"

I said it was a silly story; for one thing, water cannot turn into fire; but his point seemed to be that a book that was perhaps three thousand years old related an instance of suttee and did not refer to the act as a religious duty. He waxed sentimental about the legend. A truly great love, he said, might well make a lover wish to join the beloved and perish with "that other and for ever still body that she had so long adored."

I objected that, admitting his theory to be true, why was it that no husband ever wanted to burn himself with his wife's corpse?

"It is said that a woman's love is always the greater," dolefully submitted Balmokund, whose wife was a shrew.

As a Brahmin, he was opposed to Buddhism. I had taken out from the club library Fielding Hall's delightful book on

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Burmese Buddhism, *The Soul of a People*, and, feeling strongly pro-Buddha, I discussed it with him.

It was not a good religion, he said, because it taught disbelief in God, the Universe, the Soul, and Love.

"In my humble opinion, sir, it is because Buddha did *not* believe in those things that no man has ever thought to make him a god! There are as many Buddhists as there are Hindus. We have perhaps a million gods and goddesses, and the Buddhists have not one." He yawned. "*Naryan!*"

"Why did you say '*Naryan*'?"

"It means 'Great God.' It is for protection. When we yawn a demon may go down our throat, or part of our soul may come out, therefore we place our hand upon our mouths. We also crack our finger-joints to drive away devils. The Aryans used to do both these things. I have a pain in my stomach. Excuse me."

"There is an ancient cure, sir, for belly-ache which I have a mind to try," he said, sauntering in again. "I shall borrow a duck and tie it upon my stomach. Thereafter I shall pray to Hulka Devi, the goddess of vomiting, since it is a stomachic matter. I did not do all the necessary hand-<sup>1</sup>posings<sup>1</sup> this morning, therefore Belly is disturbed."

He maintained that Kalidasa, the Indian dramatist, was greater than Shakespeare. As I had not, then, read any of Kalidasa's plays and knew nothing of the language in which he wrote, I was at a disadvantage. Great indeed was Kalidasa; but not anything like as great as Shakespeare, though in some of the Hindu classic dramas there are many points of resemblance to Shakespeare's works. These dramas, and works like the mighty *Mahabharata*—which, in places, out-Homers Homer—make fascinating reading in the English translations; the thrills, wit, humour, and pathos they provide are as fresh to-day as they were when they were written—

<sup>1</sup> *Mudra*. The word is Sanskrit and means 'a seal'. After pronouncing the *mantram*, or magical formula, the fingers are twisted, it is said, to represent the Sanskrit written characters, and so to 'seal' the *mantram*.

## *My Babu Friend*

probably two or three thousand years ago. I know few more beautiful pieces of literature than Sir W. Jones's translation of the *Ramayana*. Balmokund quoted some passages of Kalidasa that were very beautiful, but I made no note of them. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, or *Song of the Adorable One*, was, I think, his favourite source of quotations. But I liked best to hear him talk about the mysterious *Atharva-Veda*, chiefly, I think, because he said it was the most ancient book of spells, incantations, and medicine in the world. It contains a complete enumeration of the bones of the human body. The age of the *Atharva-Veda* has been put at two thousand four hundred years, he stated, though it is probably nothing like as old. There is a beautiful legend in it: The Elements were called upon to give some deity or other a present. The Earth gave a ruby, the Air a rainbow, Fire a meteor, and the Sea a pearl—'a water-born gem.'

I liked to watch Balmokund's face when he was talking of the multi-coloured demons of the Hindu hells; he was so obviously disturbed by his own words. It was for this reason, I think, that he preferred rolling out poetic descriptions of the gods. Agni, the fire-god, was four-eyed; "He had locks of flames and chews the forest with his shining teeth." Rudra was the god of lightning; "He rides a white horse and is clad in shining gold." The "ten maidens" who, between them, are said to have produced Agni, were the ten fingers of the human hand. Incidentally, the Sanskrit word for the method of obtaining fire by twirling a pointed stick in a hole drilled in a block of wood is *pramantha*. This word, translated into Greek, it has been pointed out, is doubtless the origin of the legend of Prometheus.

One day Balmokund suddenly stopped talking and stuck his forefingers in his ears. Withdrawing them after a few seconds, he sighed.

"There are no noises in my head! "

I said that with us noises in the head meant liver.

## *Indian Mosaic*

He dissented despondently.

"It is because Vayu, the god of my ears, has departed! If to-night I should dream that I am naked I shall most surely die!" He rocked himself softly.

"Perhaps you have been eating too much!"

"In the sacred books it is written that Mind comes from eating food."

I murmured a vague heart diagnosis.

"If it is heart, I shall at once buy a new basin and drink the moon. It is a most ancient cure."

This astonishing statement he explained by saying that anyone afflicted with heart disease would be cured if they looked at the moon's reflection in a bright metal bowl and then drank off the water at a single draught. The tin basin which he would use would have to be new, for the purposes of the reflection, he said. Water, probably because nearly all forms of life are dependent upon it, has always had a sacred character for the Hindus, who liken the river Indus to a mother-cow to which all other rivers hasten as if they were her calves. The clouds they call "the cows of Indra," because their 'udders' are full of rain.

"Or," as Balmokund remarked to me airily, "your Honour may see in such clouds rocks enclosing imaginary cows."

My comment seems to have been that the 'udder' comparison suggested adulteration. But the point was missed.

"Sir, what is milk but water at base?"

Shortly after I reached the North-west Frontier I got news of the death of my genial friend Balmokund from heart disease.

## XXV

### *Dead Wood*

All religions die of one disease; that of being found out.

JOHN MORTON, *Voltaire*

IT was in Bareilly that I first entered what the late Professor Max Muller called "the bewildering forest of the sacred literature of the East." Comprehending little, but desiring much to understand, I read the chief Hindu and Mohammedan religious books, and a few small volumes of Chinese "Sayings."

Strangely enough, I frequently found the ancillary commentaries to those English and French translations more baffling than the originals they were supposed to clarify. Sometimes I had the audacity to feel it was because of the obtuseness of the commentator. To understand profoundly the soul of India a deep knowledge of Sanskrit is essential. I knew—and I know—no Sanskrit.

Translations may be dangerous guides in the uncharted domains of an alien faith, but I believe, intensely, that a love of the truth and an earnest desire to know it brings into play a sixth sense that is not far removed from an errorless intuition. "Give unto me the meed intention earns when honesty is stamped upon its aim," was my outlook towards the religious problem in those days. But I was very far from attributing it to any esoteric influences. It seemed just common sense; a man cannot pay a more sincere compliment to Truth than to spend his life in seeking it. Personally, I believe that of its very nature it responds instantaneously—a basis upon which, one evening while evicting a family of Punch-and-Judy owls from the thatched roof of my bungalow, I evolved an explanation of the Hindu's choice of



## Indian Mosaic

the snake as the symbol of Wisdom. My diary says that I "felt rather proud of it."

Apart from the fact that this ophidian 'wisdom' is referred to in the Bible, snake-worship lies coiled about the tap-root of all ancient religions. It seemed to me, then, that this reptile, which we know represented Infinity and Eternity for the ancients, was intended to symbolize the truth *because the soul could not touch It without being at once struck at by It*, as it were. That is, without getting an instant response. Once so 'struck at,' the fire of the Truth enters the soul, and, just as the human body dies when it is bitten by a snake, so Ignorance—the imprisoning materialistic 'body' of the soul (the 'rind' that Olive had written of so presciently) -- is at once infallibly killed. Perhaps it was that, I thought.

There came to me from the pages of those difficult volumes none of the inspiration that an enlightened mind would feel in watching "the hallowed dawn of the religious consciousness of man in the Sacred Books of antiquity." Being just a fox-terrier-loving subaltern, my heart did not "quiver with the first quivering rays of human thought and human faith, as revealed in those ancient documents," as Max Muller put it. Not one bit. But I became thoughtful. My conception of Love changed. Woman was not just a baffling problem; she was a divine mystery. Cupid—to use a slightly trying metaphor—became a lesser Angel of the Passion. Reading about *Shakti*—the Hindu belief in the creative God in Woman—was largely responsible for those ideas, I think. At the same time I did not feel that any sublimated form of human love would be likely to satisfy a romantic young soldier who worshipped Beauty. I looked for much more passionate realizations. Still, about that time I see that in some bombastic verse with a mystical drift I alluded to the sufferings that come when Death takes away a Beloved, as "The thunderous knocking of the King."

<sup>1</sup> In the Hindu sense, spiritual darkness

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*Aut Cæsar aut nihil.* Up till then I had deliberately sought the tranquil nothing, rather than submit to Cæsar. It came to that.

The chief thing that this cursory examination of some of the Indian sacred books taught me while the south-west monsoon was changing dry plains into lagoons of mud was, I think, that religion, like morals, was largely a matter of geography. It was only the widely tolerant Hindu religious philosophy that did not impose nationality on a polymorphous God whose highest reward for human good conduct was worked out in terms of physical enjoyment multiplied by an  $x$  quantity. That, it seemed to me, was rather like commercializing salvation. The debased Hindu religion—as opposed to what my untrained mind had been able to formulate as its idea of Hindu philosophy—was no exception. The towering figures of Christ and Buddha dwarfed all such petty spirituality, and the very thought of them was comforting by comparison. Christianity was great indeed. ‘Churchianity’ or temple-faith—was pitifully small. Heretical? That all men were equal in the sight of God was, to me, “not logic, but axiom,” to quote Carlyle.

Such was my outlook on the religions of India just before I was ordered north, to Agra.

The tedious inactivity imposed by the rains when “the dark army of the clouds with their banners of lightning and their drums of thunder” dominate the land I found inclined one to a vague spiritual uneasiness, and I was glad to be asked one evening to dine with a double chinmed little Protestant canon. The garrison loved him; his tubby and genial personality did more real good among the men than any stricter form of ministration would have achieved. The military mind dislikes austerities unconnected with active service.

After mentioning to him the books I had been reading I launched my pet theory about religion being largely a matter of geography.

## *Indian Mosaic*

He chuckled, and remarked that Oscar Wilde had said that about morals. Adverting to the Hindu religion, he quoted our Lord's words that *all* nations were to be taught, and said that Hinduism was, in his opinion, a 'localized' religion, since it had no appeal outside India. I did not know, then, that Hinduism has never made any attempt to proselytize. Christianity, on the other hand, he pointed out, has a universality that no other faith possesses, and is founded on morality.

"The Christian morality is just what some people don't like. It cramps their freedom. . . . I know these Hindu books! They're powerful opiates. The Hindu philosophy is too vague and dreamy to be of any practical use. The Bible is a tonic. . . . You should read some good, light literature. I'll lend you a couple of books to take home; they'll do you a world of good."

But I was not to be put off. I said that, as far as I knew, there had never been a schism in Hinduism. Why was that? (If Balmokund had let me down, I was lost.)

My host, sipping his port thoughtfully, said that he did not consider that schisms were always bad things. As far as Christianity was concerned, its central doctrine—the divinity of Christ—had never been really challenged in the West. "The reason that the Hindu religion has not had any schisms is simply because every Hindu is free to believe what he likes, so long as he accepts the authority of those bewildering Vedas. I have not read them myself, of course; but I hear they're like the Code of Manu—all for the Brahmins, and nothing for the wretched Sudras.<sup>1</sup> Mind you, I admire a thoroughgoing Brahmin; he's an example of what discipline and self-control can do for a man. And I like the scrupulous cleanliness of the Hindu, which is more than I can say for the Mohammedan peasant. . . . Now that I come to

<sup>1</sup> The four castes are *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (kings and warriors); *Vaishnavas* (merchants), and the *Sudras* (cultivators)

## *Dead Wood*

think of it, the Hindu Luther—I think one should call him that—Sankaracharya, is said to have found six different sects of sun-worshipping Brahmins. Perhaps they weren't schismatics. . . .”

With some earnestness, I asked him to explain why so many of the things we believe in were claimed as being essentially Christian in origin when actually they formed part of religions that were much older than Christianity. Did he know that the maxims contained in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, were to be found in the early Jewish books? and that a myth of a child-god being born of a virgin mother was believed not only in the Hindu faith, but also in the religions of ancient Egypt, China, Chaldea, Greece, Rome——

“You’ve been reading Laing! . . . I thought so! I think he quotes Carlyle, doesn’t he? ‘It matters not whether you call a thing pan-theism or pot-theism; what really concerns us is to know whether it is *true*!’ Remember that? Even Science teaches a ‘virgin’ birth. ‘The sun hatched out the first germ of life.’ Isn’t that what they say? All those legends, my dear boy, are reiterations of the fact that Cosmic Truth—which we call God—brings into being ‘God-enlightenment’ unaided by man. That’s my answer to you. Try one of those cheroots!”

“Then why isn’t everybody ‘enlightened’? Surely, in four thousand years, or whatever it is, if the Hindu religion was not a ‘true’ religion there would have been some wholesale bust-ups, Padre? Mohammedanism——”

“Is split into the Shiah and Sunnis, you mean? I forget which sect believes in the authority of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet; I think it is the Shiah. Anyway, the other one upholds Omar and the Caliphs. Yes, I believe that is it. Naturally I have never studied Mohammedanism at all deeply; but I will admit that it has done a lot to help the civilization of the world. The chivalry of the Arabs in Spain

## *Indian Mosaic*

is a fine record. I'll lend you Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella*. When the West could hardly read one of the Arab kings had a library of 100,000 volumes, and he and his son are said to have read most of them. . . . Perhaps there were duplicates. That was in the fourteenth century, though, mind you! . . . We have to thank the Arabs for the first translations of the Greek classics and for algebra . . . and one or two other bugbears of our schooldays. But as a *religion*——! Mohammed established Islam by conquest and maintained it by force of arms. Only a fighting people would accept a religion that promises salvation and sexual gratification as the reward for killing a wretched infidel. Compare that with the Christian morality; with our 'Love thy neighbour,' for example. Forbearance is a duty with us. Rome forgot that in the Middle Ages. . . . What on earth made you start reading those books?"

I told him, and he snorted.

"You ought to apply for a spot of leave. You're not looking too fit. . . . I liked your poems. So few soldiers care for poetry. Will you write an ode of welcome for the coming visit of the Duke and Duchess of York? Capital! . . . Come for a drive with me to-morrow?"

Before I went to bed I wrote out an application for a month's privilege leave in Mussoorie.

My diary for that day ends on a dialectical note:

I wonder why padres are not made to read books on the Indian religions before they come to India as chaplains?

Frog would have approved of that sentiment, I felt.

## XXVI

### *Relaxation*

It is good to be without vices, but it is not good to be without temptations.

WALTER BAGHOT, *Biographical Studies*

ONE's first spell of leave in an Indian hill-station is more than a pleasant and unforgettable experience; it is an initiation.

Unless a man is a worshipper of Self, once he has been to the "Abode of Snow"—that is the meaning of the Sanskrit word *Himalaya*—he remains for ever under its spell. Even a white man will tell you that the great hills—or the gods that dwell among them—breathe into you something of their strength; that they give clean thoughts, steadfastness, and a fierce dislike of pettiness. "Himalaya, Lord of Mountains, instinct with deity," wrote Kalidasa, the Indian Shakespeare. He knew that strange, uplifting power of the hills. Something strange, which nobody can explain, permeates the Indian atmosphere. There is no question about this queer-ness being there; even Christian missionaries admit its presence. I sensed it strongly; but in those days I blamed the climate, and, knowing it could not be due to an excess of alcohol, unperplexedly fell back upon effervescent aids to health.

It is impossible for anyone living in a temperate climate to realize what it means to escape after months of sizzling temperature into clean, cool air in a dustless land of ice-cold cascades that splash down among ferns and moss-covered rocks; where there are steeply sloping hillsides covered with deodar pines and firs that shelter, here and there, little pools of blue harebells, small islands of creamy-coloured tulips

## *Indian Mosaic*

streaked with carmine, deeper blue lagoons of violets, and a whole spangled galaxy of anemones, hollyhocks, primulas, and wild roses. And there is generally a lake in my dreams of the Indian Hills. The joy of it all comes near to being ineffable.

No wonder the Himalayas are said to be the ideal setting for a honeymoon!

The first time I visited one of those mountain paradises I had not been home for several years, and for three months had been running a malarial temperature. The night before arriving among the pines I had lain in an atmosphere vocal with the shrill trumpeting of mosquitoes, the restless tenant of a springless bed spread with a mat of woven grass on which one's sweating, tired, and itching body slipped about like a fish on a fishmonger's slab. That was in the Travellers' Rest-house that now lay six thousand feet below me in a dun-coloured haze of dust and heat. The mercury down there had stood in silvery defiance round  $100^{\circ}$  at midnight. On those hill-tops it was  $72^{\circ}$ ! No wonder everybody was bright-eyed and pink-cheeked, moved lightly and quickly, and wore smart European clothes instead of puckered, baggy, bungalow-made sacks of drill or tussore silk like those which I was wearing. To me the women seemed lissom goddesses, radiant with health and energy, not pitiful white-faced little ghosts like those whom I left in Dustypore for a merciless hot weather to bleach to a deader whiteness.

If I had just come from England I should not have felt that way. But somehow the mere sight of the civilized European shops made it all seem extraordinarily like a dream. There was only one small general store in Dustypore, kept by a pallid, anxious-looking Parsee, who gave his customers handbills:

All the most extremely English and fashionable things for my ladies and gentlemen patrons of this Station, stocked.

## *Relaxation*

I remember, well, his two boxes of evening ties. They lay cheek by jowl with a smirking German doll, all three white cardboard sarcophagi thickly layered with last year's dust.

An indifferent string band playing in a *café* that had a real plate-glass window out-harped all the harps that sound across Jordan, and the sight of a large card bearing the words "Strawberries and Cream" extorted from me an idiotic squeak of joy.

An exquisite smell of deodars and pine-wood panelling filled the hotel. The absence of dust was nothing less than an incredible luxury.

"I wrote asking you to reserve a room."

The smart Eurasian booking-clerk considered my Indian tailor's handiwork and then allotted me a pen in a log hut half-way down the hillside. When it rained—and it rains often in the hills—climbing and descending the steep zigzag path to and from the dining-room would be a series of slitherings; and the furniture would be elderly and vocal. He had sized me up accurately; another human cinder cast up from the slag-heap of the plains, I was too junior to have much money.

But what did I care what he thought? In a few minutes I would wash in blessedly cold hill water—not tepid fluidity!

"Is there a dance on to-night?"

"Yes, sir!" (sir!—not sahib!)

That evening saw a small bottle of champagne on my table. Lord knows I couldn't afford it; but champagne is the only wine that goes with a sense of superlative well-being.

The lissomness and splendour of the young goddesses became more and more astonishing.

It was all rather fun. . . .

That word sums up this hill-station business—fun. Wherever men and women gather together for relaxation always there are temptations; and doubtless certain climatic



## *Indian Mosaic*

effects and conditions of living may intensify them; in the Indian hills, as everywhere else, there are those who "squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve." But the "Eleventh Commandment" is not more invoked in, say, Simla, than it is in London or New York. Probably far less; for in India there is something that is stronger than the lure of perfumed temptations. Gods called "the Traditions of the Service" rule us with an iron rule. Them our men and our women must obey, or be outcast. We like to think we are not unjust; but we are confessedly merciless in matters touching our code of honour. And—*vide* Army divorce statistics—we see that it is good to be so. Are we not white *Kshatriyas*, "Twice-borns" of the military caste?

To Our Trusty and well beloved, . . . Gentleman, Greetings  
We, reposing especial Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty,  
Courage, and good Conduct . . .

So runs the King's Commission.

# AGRA AND DELHI



## XXVII

### *Agra of the Tomb*

The friendship between me and you I will not compare to a chain; for that the rains might rust, or the falling tree might break

WILLIAM PENN., *Treaty with the Indians*

THE visit to India of H.M. the Amir of Afghanistan found me in charge of a supply depot in Agra—a flat, prosaic area covered with pyramids of fodder-bales, boxes, cases, sacks, and crates. The dust was prodigious and the work strenuous. At the end of a week the only recreation that had come my way were the two hours I spent gazing at what was visible of the Taj Mahal through an icy morning mist, and a very similar, but somewhat longer, experience by moonlight.

The combined effects of the two excursions summed themselves up in a great wonderment and an imperial attack of lumbago. But to hear some one cry out “*Allah!*” under the central dome above the tombs, and then to hear the echoes of the sacred name calling to each other for nearly a minute and growing fainter and fainter, is something one never forgets.

One day one of our contractors, who had found out that I was interested in Persian things, brought me a hand-painted Mogul edition of Firdausi’s *Book of Rustum*. It was like a gorgeous medieval missal. The bright gold paint in the pictures had that smooth, bulgy look that makes one’s fingertips itch to touch it, and the colours in the attitudinizing little figures with the curiously small feet and the up-tailed horses with the inadequate heads and far too sharply arched necks were as fresh as if they had been painted the day

## Indian Mosaic

before yesterday instead of three centuries ago. In the border panels one could almost see pollen on the flowers.

Alas, it had to be refused. But it gave me an idea. I asked the would-be donor if he knew of a Persian who would come and tell me stories occasionally for an hour or so in the evenings.

The next day there arrived at my tent one of the dearest old men it has been my good fortune to meet. My dogs took to him at once; and what a peaceable dog thinks about a stranger is often as good a test as any. He was a story-teller, he said; but he looked so meek and mild—almost spiritual, in fact—that for a moment I doubted whether he was anything more than an ordinary, and rather indifferent, *munshi*. Generally speaking, I have found that the excellence of a *munshi* is in inverse ratio to his outward humility, the reverse being the case with the story-tellers, most of whom have all the roguish self-assurance of the strolling player.

“Have you always told stories? or have you just taken it up in your old . . . recently?”

“My father’s father, and his father before him, were tellers of stories, sahib!” It was a proud reproach.

I begged his pardon, and switched to the story of the imprisoned princess which I had heard in Madras. What did he think of it?

He fingered his white beard thoughtfully.

“God willing, I shall tell better stories, Excellency.”

And he did. But before starting one he would ask to be allowed to extinguish the lantern, and when he had done so would hold an earnest conversation with the shades of the hero and heroine, in which he addressed them as “Dear Ones”—quasi-incantations that used to make it seem as if Ferhad and his unhappy Shireen, or Lailec and her poor Majnoon, were actually present in my tent, but invisible.

His preferred stories were tremendous dramas dealing with the seven exploits of that same Rustum whose history took

## *Agra of the Tomb*

the poet Firdausi thirty-three years to write. Whenever Rustum was evoked the dogs crawled under the bed. He had a terrific voice, had Rustum.

I came to love "Mirza II" as my diary calls him, and he became quite attached to me. I was a Prince, he said in the sonorous 'broad a' pronunciation of the Persians of Isfahan; but I was also his Father and Mother. A tender-hearted Protector of the Poor, I was also a "noble lion of *Inglistan* [England]." The Oriental is outspoken in his compliments.

Twenty rupees a month was his pay, but, as it seemed too little, I added from time to time inconsiderable extras such as oranges, Virginia cigarettes, and tea. He was extravagantly but genuinely grateful. Too grateful. On the following day he always insisted on presenting *me* with a gift, the first of these retaliations taking the form of a brightly-painted little string bedstead for Lion and Patsy to sleep on. There seemed to be no getting ahead of him in this matter of the equalizing of gifts. Particularly do I remember a tin of ginger-nut biscuits that twenty-four hours later was countered by a circular wooden box full of little painted plaster figures representing various types of Indians—a dancing-girl, a washerman, a soldier, and so forth. I can see him now, his old eyes a-twinkle, taking the lid off and lifting the thin circle of purplish wadding that covered the top layer of images packed feet to feet like the parti-coloured spokes of a wheel.

"Behold your new servants, sahib!"

It was not the value of what he gave that mattered; it was the fact that he was desperately poor. When I argued with him, he replied that I had said he was my friend; in his country it was the custom for friends to give each other presents; he was old, and would soon die, but he loved me very much. . . . To have refused one of his gifts would have been to cut him to the quick, and in the end I discontinued giving him things and raised his pay instead. The next

## *Indian Mosaic*

evening he appeared followed by a coolie carrying on his head a resplendent Jaipur brass tray piled with fruit.

It was a pleasant rivalry which only my departure ended. . . .

The level plain on the day the Amir inspected the troops was an unforgettable sight. Only in India or Burma have I seen such colourfulness. Turbans and coats of every hue, parti-coloured flags, bunches of streamers, street-wide "Welcomes," and tinselled, minaretted triumphal arches were everywhere. Line upon line of khaki-clad soldiers, their sloped rifles tipped with glittering steel, stretched away into an impressive perspective—the might of Britain made visible. Behind them stood packed the might of India—a crowd a quarter of a million strong. At the near end of the line were squadrons of splendid Indian cavalry coruscating with bright points of metal, the tossing heads of their horses the only irregularity in the faultlessly dressed ranks. Horse and Field Batteries, trailing wicked-looking khaki guns, were next to them, their heavy teams jingling burnished chains as they pawed the ground in protest against the flies. The massed regimental bands, their brass instruments winking and flashing in the morning sun, stood waiting the moment when they would be ordered to strike up.

A straggling line of water-carriers were sprinkling the ground with water from glistening leather water-bags slung from salient left shoulders.

The saluting base is twenty yards to my left, the Union Jack hanging limply against the dumpy white flagstaff. There is no breeze. An A.D.C. canters into the open from the city of white tents. They are coming!

The tense murmur of excitement deepens as a little group of horsemen debouch into the roped-off review area. They are the dignified Viceroy, the soldierly "K. of K," and the portly Amir. Behind them are their respective staffs. Lord Kitchener and the Afghan King are a blaze of scarlet and

## *Agra of the Tomb*

gold with a super-refulgence of flashing medals, prismatic ribbons, and parterres of stars.

Suddenly, out of the blue bolts Patsy, in an arrow-straight dash at their horses, yelping joyfully. My shabby-looking dog-boy tries to follow her, gets the butt of a rifle in his stomach, and tries to wriggle through England's might on his knees. The Amir's horse curvets sedately, and its rider puts a steadying hand to his black astrakhan cap that is topped with an osprey plume. "K. of K." strokes his moustache with a white-gloved hand. But I am to have no part in an overthrowing of Afghanistan, thank God! The Great Ones greeted, the long-legged little bitch trots back to groaning India and licks his neck, squirming with a fatuous contentment.

A blare of brass and a thunderous drumming. The march past has started. Clouds of dust begin to obscure everything, despite all that watering. Out of the murk come throaty words of command . . . "A Company! Ey-y-es right! . . ." "B Company! Ey-y-es . . ." (Glory fidgets. Doubtless he is wondering why on earth we ever left the regiment; there is so little that is martial about the Commissariat. . . . It may be, Glory, old boy! But your master has changed.)

Twenty minutes later the cavalry and guns came past, thudding and jingling in a passable imitation of a London fog. The *tamasha* is over. We may trot back to breakfast.

Here are three of the many stories that were current about our Afghanistan visitors.

The dining-car of the special train that brought the Amir and his suite from Peshawar to Agra was supplied with heavy and appropriately engraved silver spoons and forks. But it was found that after the monarch and his staff had left the station all the silver had disappeared. Doubtless they were taken by souvenir-hunters; but the dining-car of the special train that took H.M. back to Peshawar was provided with nickel-plated table-ware.



## *Indian Mosaic*

Very late one night the electric current in the Amir's camp temporarily failed. Convinced that it was part of a plot to assassinate him, the alarmed potentate sent relays of messengers to fetch Lord Kitchener. They brought back neither the Commander-in-Chief, nor the remarks he made when he was awakened.

The Afghan King was nonplussed when he was told in Kabul that all the British bigwigs wore many medals. As he had none he ordered a dozen gold ones to be made and stamped with his own effigy. These were attached to bright coloured ribbons and sewn on to his tunic. *Se non è vero, è ben trovato!*

I promised my old story-teller that I would take tea with him in his house before I left Agra. It happened, however, that the Chief Supply and Transport Officer of the concentration camp selected that afternoon to come and thank my personnel for their work. I was saying good-bye to him as he stood surrounded by the staff when there drove towards us an enormous cee-spring barouche, drawn by two skinny horses whose once ornate harness was fastened together with odd bits of string. Of the open landau order, it swayed sickeningly.

Seated in it, bolt upright, with his hands on his knees, was the spare, white-bearded figure of the Mirza. He had come to fetch me in style.

A hope that he would halt this dominant equipage and wait for me soon vanished. As he told me afterwards, he intended that I should have all the honour of this state arrival. The Colonel-sahib, and the congregated staff of the Supply Depot, must be made to realize that this imposing carriage was for me, and for no one else.

He certainly did his best to ensure it. A few yards away from us the bony horses were reined in, and sat down on cow-hocked haunches. As soon as the barouche had swayed to

## *Agra of the Tomb*

safe stillness the old man stood up and called down upon me the blessings of Allah.

The situation was trying. British officers do not drive through camps and cantonments accompanied by venerable natives of India in hundred-year-old turn-outs drawn by comic horses. This incident, I knew, would go all over India; one-half of India lives for and on gossip. But there was nothing to be done.

"What does he want?" demanded the C.S. and T.O. sharply.

"I think he has come for me, Colonel." There was no use in saying anything else. My host-to-be had descended a set of steps and was coming towards us.

"Is he one of your contractors?"

"No, sir. He's a—— He's my *munshi*. I'm going to tea with him at his house."

"*In the bazaar?*      *Good God!*"

## XXVIII

### *Two Great Old People*

I hate the prostitution of the word 'friendship' to signify modish and worldly alliances.

MILTON, *Friendship*

FREQUENTLY the cumbersome bulk of the barouche spanned the width of the narrower streets, exercising a sort of squeegee effect on the pedestrian population by sweeping all and sundry before it. The children found our coming a cause for laughter and wonderment, but there was a trickling overflow of the aged who stood flat against the walls and, grave-eyed, drew in their stomachs. To ignore us was impossible, for the smaller of two coachmen scallywags had descended from the box-seat and was running ahead, shouting at the top of his voice.

This majestic progress ended at the top of a slit-like alley, where a brisk exchange of orders and assents ensued between Mirza II and the perspiring herald. During the talk the step-ladder was hooked into position and the old man descended. Then, after the steps had been carefully dusted with the end of the scallywag's turban, I was allowed to come down to earth.

"Be pleased to follow me! . . . *Bismillah al Rahman al Raheem* [In the name of Allah, the Compassionate and the Merciful]." The muttered invocations ceased as a key grated in a lock.

At the top of a rat-eaten staircase we came to a door on which a card hung from a nail. In florid Persian script it bore the words *Khoosh Amudaheed* ("Your coming is joyful"). I was enjoined to examine it.

"It is indeed beautiful!" Despite a crepuscular gloom, I

## *Two Great Old People*

distinguished a border of forget-me-nots. He dusted it solicitously with the end of the small folded sheet or *roumal* which Mohammedans carry thrown over the shoulder.

"My Dear One is a very good pupil, sahib!"

The pupil was his wife. Very few Indian women know how to write their own names, much less how to do elaborate inscriptions. Through the goodness of Allah, he said, there was quite a market for such cards.

After a slight adjustment of the pendulous greeting, the door was banged open and I was begged to enter.

Busy unlacing my shoes—for one enters a Mohammedan home barefoot, but with the head covered—I felt a hand laid lightly upon my shoulder. "Nay, sahib! The dust of your feet shall bless my house!"

At one end of a bare whitewashed room, sitting on a slightly raised platform, was a small, shapeless white figure resembling a subsiding snow man, the eyes being represented by two greyish disks. His wife was wearing her *boorka*, the sheet-like covering worn in the presence of strangers by all Mohammedan women south of the Frontier, and its eye-holes were covered with gauze. Her presence was the highest honour the old people could confer upon me.

"The Mirza-sahib is fortunate to sit in your shadow, Excellency!" (That was her answer to my rendering of the rather stilted compliments prescribed for these occasions.) "Be pleased to seat your honourable robes!"

Her voice was cracked and old, but her feet were the smallest adult feet I had ever seen; she must once have been very pretty, I thought. Heaven knows what I talked about while her husband was searching a chest for some photograph I had asked to be shown. I remember making one *faux pas*, when I asked her if she liked dogs.

"We shall drink tea out *there*!" Her wrinkled hand indicated the door that led on to the mud roof.

The flat Indian housetop with its protecting parapet is little

## *Indian Mosaic*

different, if at all, from the houses that existed in the time of King David, who "rose from his bed and walked on the roof." St Peter, too, it is recorded, went upon a flat roof to pray. In the hot weather many families sleep on the roof in India, and the barriers erected to frustrate the prying gaze of neighbours ranged from crumbling sections of mud-brick wall to dilapidated screens of matting. These, and the irregular heights of the houses, made it seem as if I were looking on a stepped table-land of baked brown mud bristling with the shells of flimsy habitations belonging to a vanished people.

The door leading on to this particular roof was invisible to me, as I was sitting with my back towards it.

Suddenly a torrent of horrified exclamations poured forth from beneath the *boorka*, and, struggling to her feet, my hostess swept towards the invisible door like the ghost of some vengeful dwarf. "Sons of Satan! Children of Eblis! *Aiee! Aiee!* My slippers!" The words were shrilled to a frantic clapping of hands.

The chest-lid banged, and I rose hurriedly. The housetop on which we were to have taken tea was swarming with monkeys from a neighbouring temple of Hanuman. There must have been twenty of them working havoc among the cakes and sweets set out on a pink cloth.

"*Khudaiyah! Allahah!*" shouted the Mirza, waving the *roumal*. "*Khraylee bullah ust!*" (O God! O Allah! It is calamity of calamities!").

What was left of the intended feast we gathered together again on the pink cloth, setting out to the best advantage the one remaining banana and the ravaged contents of two saucerfuls of sweets. But not even the sudden production of a small box of preserved fruits was able to wipe out the loss of the slippers.

"They had lovely red heels," she informed us, angrily voluble. "They were gold embroidered! Newly purchased! Beautiful! Specially made for this day of honour!"

## Two Great Old People

The Mirza groaned to Allah, and I eyed murderously a grey-whiskered ape which was sitting on the edge of a roof across a chasm of intervening street, inspecting one of the slippers. He was turning it over and over.

The cup in which over-sugared and severely pink tea was served to me had written upon it in letters of gold lustre "*God help you.*" I hoped he would.

"*Nosh-i-Jan!* [May it be a cup of life to you]," said the Mirza earnestly, raising his cup. . . .

Just before I left the old lady leaned forward and cracked her knuckles above my head.

"Your kindness is great! May God be your Friend!"

The barouche squeeged other streets until we came to a small house outside the city walls. I could not leave Agia without visiting his *pir*,<sup>1</sup> or saint, the Mirza said.

I do not know why, but always I seemed to be coming into contact with the religious side of India, and entirely without my seeking. Taboo in the Service, and frowned upon by every known precedent and convention, one would have said that there were the strongest possible reasons against such a thing ever happening. But happen it did, and I am glad of it. Surely there can be no better preparation for successfully working among a people than having a sympathetic understanding of their religion? Prejudice may well be a form of ignorance, and to understand truly is not necessarily to be credulous. One can be simple without being stupid. In those days, however, I took in my stride such unusual and often strange meetings, without understanding anything of their significance. Even to-day, I feel that much of it is still concealed from me.

I was presented to a stern-looking, bearded patriarch whose leonine head was surmounted by an immense green turban. Surrounded by his *moreeds*, or disciples, and holding a thin

<sup>1</sup> The Mohammedan equivalent of a Hindu's guru

## Indian Mosaic

steel walking-stick, this venerable man proceeded to put me through a mild catechism. How long had I been in India? Was I aware that Mohammedans were great admirers of the British? What did I think of yogis? Had I been to Persia? . . .

"They are good answers," he conceded. "Yet the Hindus are wrong. The Prophet (the peace of God be upon him!) has said: 'He who hath joined other gods with God hath erred with a far-gone error.' Allah has been good to you, sahib. God is closer to a man than the vein of his neck. He knows the creeping of a black ant on a rugged rock on a dark night!"

I was relieved when the *munshi* suggested that the three of us should go and 'eat the air,' as the graphic Hindustani idiom puts it; in other words, go for a drive. It saved me from a clearly indicated cross-examination on the Koran, which I had admitted to having read in Sale's translation. The Koran—the word means 'that which should be read'—is a little shorter than the New Testament, but I found it difficult reading in spite of Sale's interesting footnotes.

During the drive the conversation was carried on by the two ancients in sentences lavishly interspersed with Arabic quotations. I know no Arabic.

The sun was hot, and very soon the *pir* ordered that the barouche be halted under a huge pipal-tree beside a screeching water-wheel. Our sweating, rat-like horses again tottered to a standstill, and the *munshi* and I assisted him to alight, which he did, muttering guttural condemnations of the obstinacy of Persians in general and the step-ladder arrangement in particular. It seemed that the son of one of the Mirza's friends wanted to marry a girl whom the *haji* considered unsuitable because she was too young; and, as (obviously!) my old story-teller could only be on the side of young lovers, nothing he did, said, or offered to do or say, found favour with his formidable spiritual mentor.

## *Two Great Old People*

"But, *Haji-jee*! The Blessed Prophet married Ayesha the Faithful when she was but ten years old," he protested mournfully.

"The Prophet (the peace of God be upon him!) had ten wives and a hundred concubines," growled the old Lion of Islam. "I wish to go back!"

While the bits were being replaced in the horses' mouths he went over to the well and drank from his cupped hands.

There is a parable current among the Hindus which compares one of these noisy irrigation wheels to human life and its troubles. Once upon a time, says the parable, there was a traveller who tried to lead his horse to drink at the sloping trough into which the dredger-like arrangement of small earthen water-pots were pouring their sparkling contents. Frightened by the creaking of the wheel under the weight of the ascending *chattis*, the animal backed away. So its rider waited, watching the well-bullocks as they plodded round and round.

"What are you waiting for?" asked the well-man.

"When the noise stops I shall be able to let my horse drink," replied the traveller.

"When the noise stops there will be no water!" was the retort.

The parable goes on to say that, in the same way, when trouble ceases there will be no life. It is while we live and are surrounded by troubles that we must drink the waters of Truth.

Mirza II, voluble and agitated, came down to the railway station. After repeating for about the sixth time that he would join me at Lucknow—I was going on there from Delhi—the old man fell into one of those trying gaps of silence that mark the nadir of a seeing-off when the train again fails to justify another expectation that it is about to pull out. "Now I can give him a present without having one given to



## *Indian Mosaic*

me in return," I thought relievedly. And as the engine whistled I placed in his hands an envelope.

Through the easy tears of old age the blessings of Allah were called down upon me; but even as they rolled I was taught that in the matter of the giving of gifts, as in much else, the East knows more than the West.

Thrusting a hand into his breast, the old man pulled out—an envelope.

"Open . . . before thou sleepest." He was trotting to keep up with the carriage, and looking up at me blurredly.

Whatever else he wanted to say was cut short by his cannoning into an extensive family that was waiting for a suitable train.

In his letter was a quotation that ran as follows: "*Yād bād ān roz-i girān! Yād bād, yād bād!*" ("Remember the days that are gone! Remember, remember!")

I have not forgotten them, O my Mīrza!

## XXIX

### *The District Superintendent*

Near Lucknow we passed a company of strolling players, two young men, an old woman and her husband, and three good-looking boys. The boys had extraordinarily wicked-looking eyes, which were heavily darkened and really beautiful. But all the sins in the world seemed to look out of them.

*Extract from my diary*

I VISITED Delhi with a letter of introduction to the District Superintendent of Police.

If American journals flourished in India this particular policeman would have been in the Sensational News section every week. In India, however, "Efficiency without Noise" is the police slogan. So his name was only in the papers when there was a big European wedding or a Government House *burra khana*. He said he disliked official dinners even more than he did weddings, because he could not leave directly they were over. Nearly every village in India, I think, knows his name, for the distribution methods of "The All-India Gossip Organization, Inc.," are wondrously thorough.

Physically, he resembled a gorilla, with his barrel-like chest, general hairiness, and yellowish teeth, the front two of which stuck out. I envied his devastating inside knowledge of India, his freedom to do as he thought best, and his power. He could go where no other white man could go, and every hair of his head would be sacred. I indulged in visions of myself as a policeman, an impossible change, of course.

Fearless and as quick to strike as a mongoose, he had a big heart and loved danger. It was the combination of these things with a sense of justice as undeviating as the vengeance of God that made him so respected and loved. "He talked

## *Indian Mosaic*

horse-sense about our over-educating these natives," records my diary. His actual words were: "Even if we'd had a board-school in every blessed village for the last twenty years past it would still be far too soon to start a University. If the damn' scheme comes off it'll sow more discontent than knowledge. . . ."

He told me much that was of interest about Indian criminals and their ways. That, for instance, there is one kind of edible pulse that if it be given consistently, causes paralysis; and that—since no one is responsible for the death of an inconvenient relative when he is bitten by a snake—if the points of two sharp and long thorns are steeped in snake venom and fixed the right distance apart at the end of a long bamboo pole, a sleeper may be jabbed with pleasing safety. Or, of course, a snake may be placed in his bed. "*Zur, Zun, Zumeen* [Gold, Woman, Land]," says an Indian proverb, "are the three bringers of death."

Akbar the Great still dominates Delhi. Surely not all the other Moguls put together could equal the impress he has left upon the place. My guide told me many horrific stories of those old times, and one of these was the history of Prince Dara Shikoh and his young mistress, Roopmatee.

"Great indeed was their love for each other, sahib," he related. "When the moon was in the sky they would not sleep. Its light was the true light to love by, Roopmatee said in one of the poems she used to sing to the Prince, who caused the holy books of the Hindu people to be translated into Persian. King Aurungzebe, his brother, murdered him, and then wrote to Roopmatee saying he wished to have her in his harem.

" 'I have belonged to Prince Dara Shikoh. Why hast thou broken into my grief with a request which thou knowest I shall never grant?' That was her answer, sahib.

"But, as your Honour can judge from the royal reply,

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King Aurungzebe was mad with passion. 'How can I help myself, caught as I am in the thick ropes of your beautiful hair?' he wrote.

"So she cut off her long hair and sent it to the King, who thereupon implored her again, saying, 'Your beauty has sent me mad.'

"Then, Presence, Roopmatee took a sharp knife and gashed her face to hideousness, and sent to the King a towel soaked in her blood, saying in a letter what she had done. . . . There is a beautiful picture of her in the museum, which I shall show you. There is also a miniature of her."

*A miniature?* . . . *I had a miniature. Of course I had. . . .*

But the recollection drifted away on the surge of another story.

The policeman and I went to a performance of Kalidasa's greatest play—*Sakuntala*. The heat was stifling and the theatre packed. Most of the audience squatted on the floor, but at each side of the stage were two flimsily made boxes, one of which we occupied.

*Sakuntala* is a love drama, and deals with a beautiful young virgin who lived in a forest, the *protégée* of a community of hermits, one of whom—the aged Kanva—was her foster-father. A King who is deer-hunting comes to the hermitage when Kanva is away, and the two young people fall in love and marry. The King has to leave her, and Sakuntala thinks so constantly of him that her absent-mindedness offends a powerful ascetic, who curses her for it and says her husband shall never recollect her face. Sakuntala leaves the monastery to take her child to its royal father, by whom they are of course disowned. A ring he gave her falls into the water, is swallowed by a fish, and ultimately brought to him by a fisherman. The ascetic's curse is removed, the young king recovers his memory, and all is well. There were seven acts of all that; but we were only present from the arrival of

## *Indian Mosaic*

the king to the departure of Sakuntala with her child. I found it a tryingly slow performance in which the scenery was crude and the costumes tawdry, although much of the acting was extremely good because it was absolutely natural. Only by reading his plays can one grasp the greatness of Kalidasa's genius.

It was interesting to watch the deep emotion of the audience. The Hindu is far more emotionally responsive than the Mohammedan, and when Sakuntala spoke her farewell to old Kanva and her beloved forest many of the audience were deeply affected.

I learned that the Hindus use a white curtain if the play is a love drama, and a red one if it has any fighting in it; and that no deaths are allowed to take place on the stage, any characters whom it is necessary to kill being slain off-stage, and resurrected—generally by a god or some good ascetic—at the end of the play. The heroine's part is generally played by a boy. Indian actors are considered to be rather low in the social scale, the meaning of one of the names for an actor being "one who lives upon his wife's earnings." The usual term, however, is *nata*, a dancer, since they must all dance. There is an ungallant Hindu proverb which says that "Actresses are like the vowels which go with any consonant."

Driving back to the club, I wondered whether the girl in the miniature was an Indian actress.

One afternoon I ordered my servant to pack what I should need for a night in camp, as the D.S.P. had invited me to a snipe-shoot. The replies to my English mail would have to wait twenty-four hours. Gathering together the letters that had reached me from England that morning, I unlocked my japanned tin dispatch box to put them away.

Now, when I travelled the miniature lay in its leather case on the top of my papers; in cantonments it stood—a beautiful and silent watcher, I used to think sometimes—upon my

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writing-table. I do not think that it was not the guide's earlier mention of the Roopmatee picture that made me take up the russia-leather wallet that afternoon; recently, for some reason, the girl had been in my thoughts more frequently than usual.

Half-forgotten questions had asked themselves again, and remained longer in my mind. Would I ever find her? Was it in this bazaar or in that city that she had lived? I thought of her always in the historical past; she had become too inaccessible to belong to the present. Occasionally the words my Colonel had said about half-castes that night in Bangalore recurred to me. Especially one of his expressions, "A touch of the tar-brush," each recollection of which was sharply unpleasant—if any thought connected with Olive could be said to be that. Perhaps it was not so much 'unpleasant' as frightening, for I had adopted the normal Army standpoint as regards half-castes; they were a grade above 'the natives' and rather to be pitied for being what they couldn't help. God knows why we thought like that, but we did. Intensely. Perhaps it was because they try so hard to be Europeans and are generally so unsuccessful. Not to be sentimental, I found that a trifle pathetic, for I liked those of them whom I met.

Thinking somewhat on these lines that day in Delhi, I wondered what I would do were I suddenly to find the girl of the miniature; quite obviously, she must be either a native or a half-caste. Studying the picture with something near to nervous impatience rather than with the half-indifference I usually doled out to it, I fancied I noticed something different in the expression of the face. I tried hard to convince myself that the idea was due to some effect of light, or to my own imagination. But at whatever angle I held it the expression of the eyes remained the same: the sombreness had gone out of them.

I was still deep in the puzzle when the D.S.P. arrived,

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wearing a shooting-coat of stentorian black-and-white check with canary yellow gun-leathers on the shoulders. He wanted to know whether I was ready.

People always seemed to be asking me that.

"We shot our way into India; we shoot our way through India; in the end we may be shot out of India," runs an entry in my diary. The sport-loving Englishman is always out to kill something; and when something is killed he likes to talk about it.

Something that hadn't fur or feathers was killed while the policeman and I were out after snipe. A child of four. She had been run over by a train at a level crossing.

On the following day three Englishmen and a small assembly of Indians met in a Board of Inquiry at the scene of the accident. The local railway chief—a small, businesslike Anglo-Indian—the D.S.P., a British magistrate, the driver of the train, and the parents of the dead child were the chief actors in what, to my mind as an onlooker, was an even more poignant aspect of the drama than the one to be inquired into. The proceedings brought out the soullessness of official efficiency, and its occasional incomprehension of the Indian mind.

The train, it was elicited, was going at thirty miles an hour. The child was stated to have shown no fear. And it was in no hurry. It had "toddled" on to the permanent way, the engine-driver said. He was evidently a married man.

"Was the child running or walking?" asked the magistrate.

"Walking. She was carrying some flowers."

"Damn the flowers! Did she come at an angle, or at right angles to the permanent way?"

"She came straight."

## *The District Superintendent*

"*Tss!* . . . How was she lying?" This to the parents.

A silence and some sobbing.

"Good God! Can't you speak? Where's that other child?"

A tiny mite was thrust forward by a woman in the small crowd.

"Make her lie down as the . . . other was lying."

Submissively she allowed herself to be placed across the rails, her head resting on twelve inches of steel that still had the sun-caked blood of her sister upon its sides. . . .

The upshot of it all was a grim denunciation of parents who let a child wander about alone. (Have we *any* idea of the size of India, and the consequent scale of distances that exists in the Indian mind?)

"Have you anything you want to say?"

The parents, tight-lipped, shook their heads.

When the Board of Inquiry was dismissed, the exonerated engine-driver fidgeted. Then he "spat in the face of Hesitation" and shoved something into the mother's hand. He was an Anglo-Indian. The magistrate remarked that he was always signing papers—which was about the only reasonable thing he had said. It was very hot, of course, standing there in the sun, and he was stoutish. . . .

There is a rather beautiful word which means "to soothe a frightened horse": one is said to 'gentle' it. The D.S.P.'s 'gentling' of the parents after the board had dissolved itself was a beautifully sensitive piece of psychology; and of course they opened their hearts to him.

It was the custom, the father said, to lay flowers on the line before starting on a journey, to propitiate the god—or the devil—of the "fire-carriages." They were to have gone to Jhansi that night.

"The mother of my children went to the temple, sahib, to get these flowers, taking with her the little one because there was none to mind her. I and her sister were in the



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fields. As they walked<sup>1</sup> she said to the youngling that if the gods were pleased by the giving of flowers *she* would surely be given sweetmeats. . . .”

As usual, Youth could not wait.

<sup>1</sup> He used the expression *chaltay-chaltay* ('going, going').

## THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER



### XXX

#### *A Ghost Walks*

Where men are men, and a knife is a knife.

GENERAL SIR JAMES WILCOX, *in a conversation*

CLANGOROUSLY and thunderously the train rumbled over the long bridge at Attock, iron arch after iron arch; past grey granite towers, steel-doored and steel-shuttered, with rifle-slit windows. Below swirled the Indus, mud-coloured and rapid. The plains and low hills were iron grey and khaki deepening to brownness; those colours alone.

The hollow rumbling receded and ceased. We had reached solid ground. We were in the North-west Frontier Province at last. A railway journey of some seven hundred miles was ending. In a few minutes another human unit, 'one British officer, complete with servant, pony, and two dogs,' would join the Nowshera garrison.

The servant and the two dogs were frankly bored; perhaps they felt it was hardly worth while travelling seven hundred miles to see a wilderness of bare, stony hills that did not show a trace of civilization. The unit himself was thoughtfully visualizing his next bungalow: it would be a mud hovel set in an arid waste and sniped at day and night. Of that he was uncomfortably certain—and it did not fit in at all with his scheme to have a Bechstein grand piano.

I had been given the command of India's crack mule corps stationed at Nowshera. As one usually does, I had agreed by letter to take over my predecessor's bungalow. He was rather depressing about it when he met me at the station; he said that he was afraid I would find the compound in rather a muddle. "The place has only just been built, and I was warned of a possible transfer shortly after I moved in; so I've done practically nothing to it."

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Actually, the compound was a waste ground covered with weeds and littered with stones and builder's refuse. With a side look at me, the outgoing occupant remarked that he had an idea that it had once been a Mohammedan burial-ground. I remember thinking that it was a feeble sort of joke. In any case, it was not an attractive outlook, even from the windows; but I induced a young brother officer to share the bungalow with me. It was peculiarly suitable for two people, as a passage running from back to front divided it into duplicate halves. When I left Nowshera four years later a garden had come into being. There were lawns, pergolas covered with roses and honeysuckle, violets, pinks, carnations, and sweet-scented night-stocks; and on the day I was promoted to captain's rank I invited the corps to come up and see it, a troop at a time. There were not many roses left after they had gone.

For several weeks getting hold of the ropes of a new command took all my spare time. In addition, there were hockey and football teams to be started, a gymnasium fixed up for the men, and even a corps flag bearing the mule corps battle honours to be designed. They read proudly, our battle honours: "China," "Waziristan," "Tibet." The *pièce de résistance* was my senior warrant officer's scheme for planting trees to shade the animals during the hot weather season.

Some months later I was able to turn my attention to the making of a garden. ("Have flowers—even if only a few.") It was a biggish undertaking. Tons of stone would have to be 'hand-picked,' the ground would have to be levelled, and turf cut and carted from the river-bank oasis seven miles away. I wanted to have green strips along each side of the drive; there should be paths of fine grey shale; a well would have to be sunk and irrigation channels made. The seeds and cuttings would come from the distant Murree hills or be scrounged from made gardens in Peshawar. . . .

The fact is, I had seen the wonder-garden created by the

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famous "Guides" regiment in Mardan, fourteen miles away, and it had inspired me to these heroic measures. I too would make an oasis in the desert.

In order to shorten the long process of grass-growing one of my warrant officers suggested that *dhoob* grass should be grown on the smallest of the three intended lawns. *Dhoob* gives a poor-looking surface compared to turf grass, but it propagates itself rapidly, creeping along the ground in many-jointed lengths.

Now, outside my dressing-room window at the edge of this small lawn stood a grave. It had been left intact when the bungalow was built, because it was the reputed grave of an apparently nameless Mohammedan saint. A *pu*'s tomb may not be disturbed, for the Government of India respects deeply the religions of the peoples. And the Holy Ones of India have strange powers. Those who deny this merely proclaim their ignorance. To make curses work may be a low form of spiritual development, or it may be black magic of the blackest kind; but if it be black magic, then some of the happenings in the Old Testament seem not to belong there. However that may be, one meets instances of it in India. One story of a curse that worked is well known, and to tell it here is distinctly a digression; but, as it may be looked upon as a preparatory argument, I will summarize it briefly.

A Hindu ascetic had taken up his abode under a tree in an area in which it was desired to lay out a cantonment golf course. He was requested to remove his ash-besmeared self, his rags, and his deerskin to another spot. He refused, and was thereupon interviewed by a conciliatory committee of three—the cantonment magistrate, the layer-out of the golf course, and the D.S.P.

Offers of cash compensation and threats of expulsion alike failed to wring an assent from him, and he finally was escorted off the premises by stalwart and unsympathetic Pathan policemen. Before he went he invoked Siva the

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Destroyer and announced that all the three sahibs should die within the year and that the house it was intended to build should never reach completion. The cantonment magistrate died that year; but it is known that he had long been a martyr to malaria. The D.S.P. had a horse accident, and *he* died; but somebody else was killed at the same time. The third man happened—or decided—to go home on leave. Standing on the deck of the ship in Bombay harbour, he was talking to a brother officer about the curse, which most of British India had heard of in some form.

“ I’ll admit that it’s curious about the C.M. and the D.S.P. . . . But one can’t get away from coincidence. That’s all that these supposed ‘ occult ’ happenings really are. The year is up to-day—in ten minutes, to be exact—but, as you see——”

In that second of time a laden baggage-sling broke, and shot a ton of trunks and cases on to him, which he accompanied down a thirty-foot hatchway.

I have myself kicked up the turf under a tree and seen the red brick-dust under the green. In Nowshera.

It was curious, having a saint’s grave in the middle of one’s garden.

The grave of a saint, if it is not a built-up tomb, is generally covered by a longish mound of earth and stones. At the head of it is a low, mud-brick erection shaped somewhat like a Gothic window. In this there are sometimes one or more niches in which little lamps are set on Mohammedan feast days, or on Fridays, the Mohammedan sabbath. This particular grave had such an arrangement, but in a sad state of disrepair.

Now, from out of the opposite end of the mound grew a tree. Whether it originally had any significance I cannot say—there are sects who believe that the souls of the good inhabit fruit-trees, and Hindus sometimes worship Mohammedan shrines—but it is necessary to mention it. It is also

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necessary to mention two other things: that *dhoob* grass will not grow in the shade, but must have sun; and that one branch of this tree, larger than the rest, cast a shadow under the almost vertical sun.

The *dhoob* grass would not 'take' on the shadowed area, and there was an unsightly bare patch. I told my Afridi gardener, Syed Mohammed, to saw off the offending branch.

The order was met by a flat refusal. Whoever sawed off that branch would be haunted by the *bhoot*, or 'spirit,' of the Holy One, he assured me—"in spite of what has been done in his service!" He was referring to the fact that, disliking the untidy look of the grave, I had had it tidied up and had told him he could spend two annas a week on oil to burn in an earthenware lamp on appropriate occasions. But I felt that he was right, and the branch was pulled up by a rope passed over a higher fork and there knotted. He said he was as pleased as if I had given him five rupees; which I doubt. However, I received through my Indian officer an unofficial message of thanks from the men of the Mule Corps, and a very official visit from the Corps' *protégé*, whom they called "the *Sain fakir*," a delightful, toothless ancient who went about draped in a red hospital blanket with a rose stuck behind his ear. I used sometimes to think that at his age—he was over eighty—he ought to have known better.

"What would have happened if I *had* sawn off the branch?" I asked.

"The *bhoot* would have come to you in the form of a snake, sahib! Or you might have gone blind or been killed. . . . This night I shall light for the first time the lamp your Honour has presented to the *pir-salub*. He will be very contented." It happened to be a Friday.

Knowing my co-tenant's contempt for all phases of the occult—a chance mention of General Cannington's "weird mystery" remark had revealed that to me—I avoided any mention of the incident of the branch.



## Indian Mosaic

July on the Frontier is a wicked month, and our veranda thermometer was registering 110° at midnight. That night after mess my tenant cycled to the bungalow ahead of me, I following on foot. It was pitch dark, and his broad shoulders and white mess kit soon dissolved into the surrounding blackness.

Coming up the drive, I saw with a curious sense of content the yellow glimmer of the tiny lamp. Overhead were the glorious stars which the heat haze seemed to magnify to a more than usual brilliancy. Was the old *pir* somewhere up among them and able to see the honour that Syed Mohammed had rendered to his last resting-place? I wondered. From the stars to the grave seemed so very, very far. . . .

My wondering ended abruptly. With a heavy thump a stone hit the lamp and shattered it.

Now, the assassination of British officers on the North-west Frontier by religious maniacs called *ghazis* not being unknown, I thought for a moment that this missile was a signal for an attack by a band of rascals of some sort, and regretted that my white uniform made me a good target. Also, I was unarmed.

Peering ahead in the direction from which the stone seemed to have been thrown, I discerned a misty-looking figure on the veranda. Our trusty watchman was, of course, nowhere to be seen. It seems to be a point of honour with those men never to be at hand when they are wanted.

“*Kaun hai oodher?*” (“Who is there?”) I called.

My tenant’s voice answered.

“Did you throw that stone?” I was half-incredulous.

“Yes!”

“Why?”

“Because I loathe and detest anything that smacks of superstition! Why on earth do they want to stick up a lamp on that grave? It’s just damned nonsense and shouldn’t be encouraged!”

## *A Ghost Walks*

We separated rather grumpily, and turned in.

At 2 A.M. I was awakened by a furious barking of dogs, mixed up with weird moaning and praying. The sounds were coming from my tenant's bedroom. Every now and then I heard him cry out, "The snake! The snake!" (*The snake, notice; not a snake.*)

Padding out into the dividing passage with a cocked 7-inch Webley, I peered round the door-jamb of his room. There was my stone-thrower, leaning against the wall with his pyjama jacket torn to the waist. The hurricane lamp burning in the bathroom revealed that two of the legs of his camp bed were broken. Now, any shaken man is an unpleasant sight; but when he happens to be a soldier surrounded by his own weapons it makes matters worse—especially in that temperature. Nothing I could do or say would soothe him. I managed to get him to sit on a chair, but he was shaking as if he had the ague. Every now and then he would suddenly exclaim, "*The snake! God, the snake!*" I wanted to find out whether he had actually been bitten by a snake, but each time I tried to examine him he beat my hands away.

At this stage the trusty *chowkidar*, complete with naked sword and looking extremely sleepy, put in an appearance.

Him I sent running for a doctor. . . .

By now, of course, all our servants were awake and my bearer suggested imperturbably that we should have tea; and we did.

Five of us with lanterns examined the dust round the bungalow that night for traces of a snake; but there was not even the imprint of a *chowkidar's* foot. Another curious thing is that his dog did not start to bark until the victim of the nightmare started to shout; if there had been a snake he would have lifted the roof off. His master was asleep, lying on his back and was awakened by feeling something thrusting itself under his ankles, so that he shifted his feet a little.

"Immediately the snake—or whatever it was—began to

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slide more quickly; and, still slithering under my ankles, came across my thighs and slid up under the small of my back. The thing was wrapping itself tightly round me. I struggled with it, but I could see nothing. . . .”

A little Scotch padre who came to live in those rooms—their late occupant having flatly refused to sleep in the house again—suggested that it was all a nightmare. The punkah-wallah, he explained, had fallen asleep, and the punkah-thong had consequently sagged on to the sleeper and given him the impression that it was a snake. But I can swear that was not the case; the thong was hanging in a low loop some four feet above the bed.

The same padre told me later that for the first few nights after he came to the bungalow at about 2 A.M. he heard the sound of footsteps on the grass-matting in the bedroom; but, though there was a light in the room, he could see nobody.

“One of these ‘nightmares,’ Padre?”

“Do you know, I don’t think that boy *had* a nightmare!”

## XXXI

### *A Day's Work*

The gods sell us all good things for hard work.

XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*

*Chhota* hazri tyar hai, sahib!" ("Early tea and toast, sahib!")

It is 5 A.M., after a hot, windless night, and Mohammed Baksh is calling me. So is my canary, Bob. Sleepily I plough my hair with my fingers, and sit up.

Two mongrelish terriers, released from being brushed, tear across the matting and leap on to my bed, whereupon a couple of robber crows abandon patent designs upon the breakfast tray, and fly a few yards with a windy rustle of wings. They perch again on the veranda railing and watch me and the dogs.

I slap a mosquito into Nirvana. "Has the black pony been watered? Pour out the tea, please!" Contrary to the general belief, there are words for 'please' and 'thank you' in Hindustani.

"*Ji-hān, sahib!*" ("Yes, sahib!")

At the side of my bed there is now a battered tin tray, on which are: a chipped blue-banded teapot, a slightly more chipped cup and saucer, a pink-edged plate two sizes too small for the pile of buttered toast cut into fingers, and a diminutive no-band-at-all milk-jug with a hare-lip. The above is a complete list of an average captain's early-tea crockery, although a ragged-looking poached egg reposing in a film of greyish water is carried in on another plate at the moment that the cool sound of water being poured into a tub comes from an adjoining bathroom.

I regard the ragged-looking poached egg distastefully, slap

## *Indian Mosaic*

a few more mosquitoes into Nirvana (or Hell, with luck), consult my watch . . . and lie down again. There is plenty of time, and I'm a bit tired. Why? A string of answers rush through my mind like race-horses past a winning-post. Yesterday's two hours of early-morning drill in a baking heat was followed by an interminable hour of Orderly Room; then had come two grilling hours of Inspection; in the evening half a dozen sets of singles; after mess a dance at the club. . . . But the tiredness I feel is a pleasant tiredness; I have only to stretch and it disappears! To-day there is a route march. At 6 A.M. (it is only 5.15, thank God!) we are due to start several hours of sweating, dusty trekking. I shall ride, of course. But that won't stop this burning prickly-heat round my neck. The Indians say that he who has prickly-heat is sure not to die that year. . . . To-day is mail day—which means letters to be answered. . . . An hour's Pushtu lesson at four o'clock. . . . At five my company hockey team has to be coached. . . . The ride out to the Marble Rocks with little Bayle of the R.A.M.C. will have to be put off until to-morrow. No, confound it. To-morrow's a polo day! . . . Rough luck on old Bayle to have won the final heat of the Kadir cup after two spills and a broken collar-bone, and then to be told when he went to be weighed out that he was disqualified because he had lost one of the weights from his weight-cloth! No wonder he wept! . . . I suppose it's a privilege of youth . . . this . . . marvellous ability to control sleep . . . Slee— . . .

“*Chhota hazri tunda ho-gya, sahib!* [The tea is cold, sahib!] . . . Quarter to six, sahib! . . . Black pony ready, sahib!”

“Good Lord! It *is* a quarter to . . . ! Bring fresh tea, quickly!”

I am splashing in my tub after the world's quickest shave. Sweat softens the stubble; a feeble sort of consolation for the temperature.

## *A Day's Work*

"The Gift of Mohammed" achieves a final perambulatory rub to the buckle of my Sam Browne belt as I walk on to the veranda in a well-laundered khaki-drill uniform with knife-pleats ironed into the arms, holding a half-finished cup of scalding tea in my hand. My stars and buttons wink in the level morning sun. I know that, and it pleases me. Childish!

The pony is being held by the old *chowkidar*, who wears the rusty cutlass he carried all night. Circumspectly, he is giving Rory a few flaccid stalks of lucerne. He is holding the pony because the *sais* has run on ahead so as to be at the parade-ground when I arrive. He sweats rivers on these runs, but seems to like it. Sweat is coolness, of course. . . . Near the *chowkidar* is the *mali*, who adroitly uproots a weed as I appear. It is unusual to have a Mohammedan gardener, but the courage of the Hindu *mali* wilts at the thought of the North-west Frontier. *Malli* is the name of their tribe—not their occupational cognomen, which for some reason generally drops an 'l.'

A lone figure stands far behind them—the sweeper. The broom he carries under his arm probably differs little from that carried by his ancestors in the time of Alexander the Great and Hindu kings before him.

Four hands fly upward in a salaam, causing the pony to back nervously. The *chowkidar* makes pacific noises, as if he were passionately kissing the air.

A last gulp of tea, and Rory's hoofs *clop-clop* down the dusty drive. Lion and Patsy bark delightedly and launch themselves upon a world beyond my compound gates. Another day's work has started.

My corps' lines are a mile down the Grand Trunk road. Nine lines of neat mud-brick one-story barracks, and nine lines of ceaselessly switching long tails. When the whistle blows for "Feed" the air vibrates with a storm of whinnying and eight hundred odd eager heads rise as if they were

## *Indian Mosaic*

but one neck to the lot of them. After a couple of weeks with a Transport Corps one learns that a mule is not the obstinate beast that popular opinion makes him out to be. He has a will of his own and sometimes asserts it with a persistence that is always gentlemanly; that is all. Patient, intelligent, hardworking, and gentle—all four adjectives are appropriate to the Indian *kutcher*. He will pull every ounce of his weight when a gall the size of a sixpence has become an open sore the size of a man's hand and which all our veterinary's care cannot do much to ease; he will stand stock-still, as if waiting for instructions, when a bullet has drilled a hole in his stomach. Sometimes, of course, like his masters, he is an offender. I had a heavy-headed old Argentine who always managed to slip his shackles at night and wandered round the lines in search of a fight with hoofs and teeth. I think he knew that his selected adversaries were securely hobbled and that he would have things all his own way. "Sikander" we called him, for there were few mule-worlds he had not conquered. Alexander the Great would not have been flattered, for that is the Indian form of his name. "Sikander has eaten the office geraniums, sir," reported my senior warrant officer one morning; and it was true. But he had not only done that; he had also destroyed what he probably considered were the consequently quite useless flower-pots. To mix the metaphor, he was an impassive general scapegoat, and was once even blamed by the Corps *bama* (whom I cordially disliked) for the fact that there were weevils in the flour when I paid an unexpected official visit to his shop. Sikander having kicked him, he had been unable to go down to the bazaar, he said. I promoted Sikander to leader of the O.C.'s baggage mules.

Once a month we had a commanding officers' parade. Then the eight pack troops and our quota of clumsy, tarred Army Transport carts were drawn up on the parade-ground, and the precision and winking smartness of the ranks of

## *A Day's Work*

men, animals, saddlery, and burnished steel gear would have rejoiced the heart of a guardsman. The polished leather panels of the pack saddles had the same rich, red-brown sheen as the conkers which I used to collect at school; but the pack saddles were glassier.

Drill over, there was Orderly Room. Would that I were once more going down to my little office with the wholly inadequate punkah that blew all the papers off the table whenever I shouted at the punkah-wallah. I once left lying on that same table a box of pins with red paper flags on them, which I used to stick into a large-scale map of India to mark the progress of Northern Army manœuvres. My orderly, thinking they were decorations which I conferred upon the map whenever I felt like it, one morning afforested the Indian Peninsular with the entire contents of the box, and failed to understand why I was not pleased.

We had little or no crime in the corps. Only occasional "Dirty buttons," fisticuffs, or the giving of backchat to some newly appointed lance-corporal ("lance-naicks" as they are called) whose sudden translation had been too difficult to be immediately assimilated. We had one desertion; and this is the story of it.

The delinquent was brought before me by an armed escort; behind him stood his troop commander with a pleased look on his face; and on my left my portly senior warrant officer.

"Driver Faiz Ali, sir! Desertion. Arrested in Rawalpindi."

"Why did you run away?"

"I want to join the cavalry."

"You should have said so before you were attested. Why do you wish to go to the cavalry?"

"I like horses—not mules."

"Why?"

"Mules are *kooch-nahun* [nothing]!" Shade of Sikander!



## *Indian Mosaic*

"The Prophet Mohammed (the Peace of God be upon him!)," I remark patiently, "loved his mule *Dul-dul*, and even bequeathed it, with many recommendations, to Ali, his adopted son. How, then, can you say mules are 'nothing'?"

"The cavalry are *bahadur-log* [heroic people]! I want to fight for the British Raj—not to clean mules."

It is sad that such transcendent martial zest should be suspect; but it is. I ask for the police report.

"... Frequents the house of Asmina-bee, a widow woman of this city. . . ."

"Remove the prisoner!"

We deliberate. He has offended against Section 29 of the Indian Army Act. It means a summary court-martial, a sentence of imprisonment, and dismissal from the service.

"He is our best hockey forward," pleads the sub-divisional commander. "I was going to recommend him for promotion."

"Why not ask the D.S.P. for information about this Asmina-bee," I suggest, to gain a little time.

"Sahib, I have a petition!" My Indian officer—a bearded giant who has three times won a medal in the Sword *v.* Sword contest at the Military Tournament at Olympia—goes on to say that he knows something. Asmina-bee, it seems, has a daughter, Fatima. The boy's troop commander wants to marry her. But she is in love with the prisoner, and Asmina-bee has hidden her. "This lad's life has not been made easy," or words to that effect, conclude the knowledge.

To search for an unfindable girl, I reflect, can be upsetting.

"A charge of 'Absence without leave' will cover the case."

"It is your Honour's pleasure," says the Indian officer, hugely pleased.

A letter from the Brigade Office is laid before me. By

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what authority, it asks, is my mule corps using a flag? That's the new brigade major! The question will be smoothed out when I dine at the G.O.C.'s house this evening. . . . A score of my signatures are necessary on various routine papers. Not official letters, only requisitions and returns. Now, I had a Sikh head clerk, Sant Waryam Singh, whom I could have trusted with my life; so I used to turn up the corner only of each sheet of those neatly stacked papers—there were even books of them—and scribble away rapidly. The contents could safely be trusted to take care of themselves. . . . But not always. There was once an officer who had an Indian head clerk who hated him; and *he* turned up the corners as I used to do. And because the guile of Babu-dom can be great, sandwiched among the pile of papers was a letter addressed to the Quartermaster-General in India, which ran as follows:

*From* CAPTAIN X.Y.Z.

*To* THE QUARTERMASTER-GENERAL,

SIMLA

Sir,

I have the honour to state that I consider myself utterly incompetent to carry out my duties.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

X Y Z, *Captain*

It reached its destination.

Great, great, indeed, is the power of the humble Babu! One of these good fellows, who wanted long leave, wrote me a pcrservid poem:

Long Live the King and Queen  
Almighty bring soon success  
Never come any trouble unseen  
Jointly both may have happy bliss  
Oh Lord ring out all evils from his reign  
No cunning false thief remain  
Enjoy soundly day and night  
Sun and moon may I hope delight

## *Indian Mosaic*

your most obedient and humble servant who asks for three months' leave to attend a law case

PRAG NARAIN TIWARY

He got his leave.

One day, when a faint green was at last shading the newly-levelled brown soil of the lawns and the flower-beds, and hedges were bristling with emerald spear-heads of blossom and leaf-to-be and I was able to look with pride upon the fruits of long labours, a plague of locusts swept down upon the cantonment. They came in a red cloud that continually changed its shape, as a cloud of migrating starlings changes shape as they fly. That cloud was said to be two miles long, a mile deep, and eighty feet thick; and it diminished the light of the sun.

Looking at it as it came nearer and nearer, my heart sank. But I clung to a faint hope. Locusts are said to travel twenty miles a day; they might pass us. But they descended; tons of locusts, that hopped, skipped, and rustled and were hideously chitinous, and the noise of whose wings was like heavy rain. The garrison was mobilized to fight them under the orders of the cantonment magistrate. Long trenches were dug; huge fires were lighted; men armed with brooms, shovels, and branches, and holding sheets by their four corners, swept at or caught them and threw them into holc and flame. Their bodies filled the trenches and quenched the fires, and the stench was evil. But pestilence can ensue from the putrefaction of locusts' bodies.

Our fight lasted three days, and I hardly think we should have won at all had not a dust-storm swept red millions of the vanguard into the Kabul river. For weeks afterwards there was not an inch of green to be seen anywhere, only naked desolation.

In some parts, Indians eat locusts fried in *ghee* (butter) with onions and salt. The insect's wings, head, and prickly legs are first plucked off, and its inside taken out.

## *A Day's Work*

During the battle with those armoured hosts of Beelzebub I nearly lost a tame mongoose which I had caught in that same garden. Swept into a half-filled trench, he was only just seen in time. Getting him out was a revolting job. Locusts scrunch horribly when one walks on a foot depth of them. . . . Mongy, as he was called, used to sleep on my shoulder when I was reading, or writing home mail. Once he fought with a cobra which my *sais* found in the stables, and the snake struck at him; but the next second Mongy had him by the neck and it was all over. The cobra's bite was a direct hit in the left flank. Thoughts of a possible anti-venene injection were driven out of my head by seeing the mongoose, after he had chewed the reptile's head a few times, suddenly shoot away across the compound and disappear down a drain. "That is the end," I thought.

My bearer tried to comfort me by saying that the little animal would eat a secret herb which all mongooses know of, and so cure himself, and I have to admit that in two days' time Mongy was back again, apparently none the worse. The blood of a mongoose, I am told, like that of hedgehogs and some birds, has a certain resistance to snake-venom.

Sometimes the walls of my Chelsea study fade away and I find myself looking once more at the low hills and plains around Nowshera. I see again the garden I made, and the grave. Sometimes it is the banks of the Kabul river at sunset that I see, and the water seems to be once more red with the blood of men, as happened often during the millenniums of India's history. . . . It was in Nowshera that, having nearly shot a brother officer with a Mauser pistol, I lived for four years with the souvenir of a neatly holed window-pane to teach me carefulness. It was in Nowshera that a *sais* employed by another brother officer, who had lent me a bolting pony called Iron Jaws while he was away on leave, tried to kill me because I had discharged him. One night when I was

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about to ride to Mess he took off the curb-chain, and Iron Jaws bolted for five miles in the pitch dark, trying to brush me off against tree-trunks. I thrashed that *sais* when I got back—the only native of India whom I ever struck.

The North-west Frontier is grim always; torrid in summer, and freezingly cold in winter. To look at, it is inhospitable; but a tang of danger and a certain omnipresent tenseness make one fond of it. Of the many Indian stations I served in I liked Nowshera best of all—with the exception, perhaps, of Quetta. Brave John Nicholson—loved and dreaded for his bravery and swift justice—lived in Nowshera, and I remember when the thunder rattled sharply among those desolate hills I used to think, as the people of Nowshera still think, that it was the sound of his charger's hoofs as he galloped to battle.

## XXXII

### *Active Service*

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,  
And the women come out to cut up what remains,  
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains  
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

RUDYARD KIPLING, *The Young British Soldier*

READING over my diaries, I see the following entry:

One of our pickets was nearly captured during last night's storm. A double company had to be sent up to relieve it. Thank God, it wasn't my job! The rifle flashes from and around the picket's *sangar* or circular stone barrier, were rapid and continuous. Pretty, too—like fireworks. When the thunder and the rain had stopped we could hear our fellows calling down to the camp. A 9-inch black-and-yellow centipede was in my bedding-roll. An accursed night . . .

All punitive expeditions when on the march across the North-west Frontier look like an endless brown ribbon of ants. Troops and transport wind in and out of the contours of the hills, mile after mile. Mostly the road is narrow, but sometimes the fighting head of the column debouches into an open plain, and then the long thin trickle of khaki forms into a puddle that here and there glints sharply when the sun catches a rifle-barrel or a bit of metal. A cloud of dust rolls to windward as the strung-out transport forms into half-troop lines before crossing the valley, while the fighting troops, consisting of Indian cavalry, a British regiment, three Indian infantry regiments, and a mountain battery, deploy into battle formation. There is a pleasant thrill of expectation in the air, for at any moment we may come into touch with the enemy. . . .

The two first frontier expeditions I was on were against the Zakkha Khel Afridis and the Mohmands respectively.

## *Indian Mosaic*

For cowardly robbery and cold-blooded, treacherous murder, the Afridi Pathans have few if any equals. Yet they are among the fiercest and bravest fighters in the world, and were loyal to us during the Mutiny—thanks to their hatred of the Hindu. Physically splendid men, they are generally dirty in their persons, possess the eyes of hawks, and have noses like curved beaks. Human birds of prey, they call themselves "*Ben-i-Israel*," or children of Israel, for they will tell you that Nebuchadnezzar sent them from Jerusalem to Kabul, after the destruction of the temple. Their greased and curled side-locks give them a distinctly Jewish appearance.

On the Zakkha Khel expedition all British officers of Indian units were ordered to wear a khaki turban. Apparently the Afridis had heard of the Boer practice of picking off officers, and intended to give us special and personal attention! I found a turban a top-heavy arrangement; still, it was amusing to wear one. The cavalry officers and the Indian rank and file laughed at the chin strap I had had sewn on to it. But it kept the thing on.

Trotting up and down the line, I find that we cover something like a mile of road. My job is to keep the animals closed up; a gap caused by the halting of one string of three animals soon widens, as the transport ahead keeps moving forward. Should anything block the road it is a case of "all hands to the pumps," for into one of these wide gaps tribesmen may swoop down, and, before troops can be brought up, slaughter twenty or thirty mules and their defenceless drivers, and be away again unscathed. Sprinkled along the line at wide intervals, in one's and two's, is our infantry escort. They hate the job; it is not a man's work, they say, to defend baggage mules. But we, who are the apple of the General Staff's eye, and incidentally their greatest responsibility, know differently; without the baggage mules where would the column be?

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On one side of us stony mountain-sides shoot upward for a couple of thousand feet or more. Along the crest-line a few tiny figures are silhouetted against the pale blue sky, leaping from boulder to boulder like mountain goats. Our flank-guard pickets. On a flat plain a mile or two ahead of us is a big cluster of mud houses with here and there a square mud tower rising out of them. Around this huddle of brown dwellings are a few green fields. It is not too hot, but the glare of the sun is trying.

The line comes to a standstill. Word is passed back that a mule has fallen, and I trot forward to see what is to be done. A mule has not fallen; the column has been ordered to halt. The enemy are holding the road ahead of us, somebody says. Are we to off-load? Nobody knows. A messenger is sent to find out. No attempt is made at conversation.

*Crack! Pr-pur-eeing!* A bullet has ricocheted from a rock. A distant irregular popping starts along the crest-line. Then comes a sharp bang; and another; and another. The mountain-guns are in action. A horse whinnies. "Are we to off-load, sir?" My placid senior sub-divisional commander is an old hand at this sort of thing, and wears the Tirah and China medals. To me it is all very new; but the exhilaration of it is like champagne. "I don't know," I answer. Together we watch. Three small fleecy rings of smoke have just broken against the sky, high up that grey slope. *Pop-pop-pop!* Shrapnel. The infantry moving into action have yellow fringes on their turban ends. These Sikhs are big men, but they too climb like goats. God help the Afridis if they get among them. The reverse applies with equal force; so it will even out—maybe.

A staff-officer on a skittish charger wends his way to me through my mules. "The General would like you to take your transport into the big *nala* [watercourse] round the bend."

"Right! Are we to off-load when we get there?" (We had been marching for six hours.)



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"I should think so; your fellows are pretty quick at——"

The skittish horse nips the neck of Sikander. There is a savage squeal, and he is bitten back with compound interest. Happily, the line starts to move again. . . . My mules, packed into the huge *nala*, fill it with a lumpy sea of loads. I notice that some few need retying. Two of them are the Brigade Major's camp office-boxes. They have yellow bands painted all over them. Why? *We* never lose anything! It isn't done! . . .

Firing has started in the rear-guard, and I trot back to see what is happening.

"A blasted sniper!" The rear-guard commander squints at his wrist-watch, the face of which is covered by a network of little silver bars. He and I were playing tennis at the club, three days ago. It seems longer than that. . . . Dismounting, I become aware of a group of men round a covered-in stretcher. A man has been killed. We don't leave our dead; we carry them. Unnameable things may happen to a dead body. This one will be buried in the next camp and the soil stamped down and a fire lighted over the spot and the ashes kicked about. Our camouflage against Man. We hope the ash will defeat the hyenas' noses. Hyenas like dead bodies.

The rear-guard commander and I exchange cigarettes and a match. Suddenly up the hillside a heavy cloud of white smoke drifts slowly and the sound of a sullen bang rolls down to us. This particular sniper is using a village-made *jezail* gun, and black powder. A young Mahsud soldier sitting a few yards off the road, sucking clouds of blue smoke out of a *biddee*, or Indian cigarette, is now lying down. He was holding the cigarette in one end of his clenched fist and sucking at the thumb end of the same clenched brown hand.

"*Margya, sahib!*" The *jemadar*,<sup>1</sup> having reported that the young Mahsud is dead, salutes smartly. In the silence the firing at the head of the column sounds brisker.

<sup>1</sup> A commissioned Indian officer who ranked as a lieutenant

## Active Service

The best shot in the rear-guard company is called up. A Pathan. Guttural Pushtu words sputter. The young Pathan salutes, returns to his comrades, and proceeds to take off his heavy marching-kit, keeping only his rifle and bayonet. Then he starts up the hillside. Four men, *with accoutrements*, follow him, keeping about fifty yards in his rear. Or maybe it is seventy-five yards. The sniper who killed the cigarette-smoker also killed the first man, and the young Pathan has been sent up to deal with the owner of the *jezail*.

Some time later, up among that wilderness of boulders, some one shouts—who, we don't know. Then somebody shouts back, and another cloud of white smoke billows from behind a rock. Our man and his covering party are invisible. Ten minutes after comes the sharp report of a Government rifle, and I remark that I ought to return to my mules as we may be moving any minute.

The rear-guard commander does not answer, but slams his field-glasses into their case and lights another cigarette.

"He's got him!"

The young Pathan lopes down to us, carrying two weapons. One is a gas-pipe *jezail* with a long narrow butt studded with brass nails.

"*Shabash!* How did you manage to do it so quickly, Gul Mohammed?"

"The Rose of Mohammed" frowns as if the praise displeased him. But all questions demand an answer.

"I knew his habits, sahib. He was my uncle."

The Government whose salt he had eaten had given him an order, and that order had been obeyed. He probably had also hated his uncle; so many of them do.

That is the North-west Frontier way.

It is good to get into camp and see my transport delivering each regiment's baggage in its particular section of the camp as neatly as bottles of morning milk. From a hundred

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different points comes a sound that, once heard, is never forgotten—the *clink-clink* of iron picketing pegs being driven into the ground. The sun is setting stormily, and the smoke from the camp fires is Cambridge blue against black and purple. A golden haze of dust hangs over everything. The Transport is blamed for that, of course; and we *do* kick up a dust when we move; but there is digging going on—the clicking of picks and the chugging of spades. The camp is being encircled with trenches. The men whose turn it is to hold them are not envied. No one who has little sleep and a life-and-death responsibility can be envied. We Supply and Transport people can—if we can and if we will—sleep through a night attack on the camp. But we neither can nor want to.

After I have watched the mules being groomed and inspected their backs I stroll over to where a Highland regiment is bedding-down in the dust. It is good to hear their broad Scots accents; one feels curiously safe near them. I mess with the regimental officers, and I hear the day's news while we drink, very contentedly, dust-and-mutton-bone soup and split ration biscuits. Two British officers were killed this afternoon and I knew them both. . . .

That night one of our pickets was heavily attacked three times. When a reinforcing double company got to it the picket was practically wiped out. For some reason they had not built any head-cover on top of the circular stone wall, and the Afridis picked them off when the lightning flashed. Every Indian officer and N.C.O. was killed, and all were shot in the head or chest. They carried the bodies into camp on stretchers, and I thought the procession would never end. Some of them were lying on their backs with their arms raised, as if in the act of firing a rifle. *Rigor mortis*, I suppose. As the stretcher-bearers walked, the arms, as they stuck up into the air, moved stiffly, several inches, backward and forward. . . .

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I spoke to one of our prisoners. There was bayonet-work on that hill during the night, and a young Afridi whose face when I saw him recalled a certain Italian artist's picture of St John the Baptist, was bayoneted in the stomach. He had been brought into camp for medical treatment, and was lying on a stretcher, very still and flat in his blue smock and baggy trousers. "He had a twist of grass shoved into his wound, like a bung, when we found him," said the hospital assistant, pinching a nether lip worriedly.

The boy, though he made no sound, was in agony. I asked him why he fought against us. "God knows best!" he answered.

What 'best' did God 'know' in sending that bayonet into him, I wondered. . . .

Of modern war can *anything* be said that is pleasant? The chivalry that used to be in fighting has vanished. As I see it, the proper kind of personal courage—that of a man meeting a fellow-man in mortal combat for a personally dear cause—has become an artificially cultivated, superficial, mass indifference to a human Hell. On the North-west Frontier there is nothing pretty about the fighting, and it is ding-dong stuff; but there is no poisoning of men in a crueller manner than that which we adopt when we poison vermin.

*But*, there is sometimes mutilation.

I saw a case of it.

One of my young drivers disobeyed orders, and after night-fall left the camp to go into the open beyond. He had no need to go for the purpose for which he went. We heard him scream in the darkness for hours, unable to go to his aid in a no-man's land seamed with tortuous chasms varying in depth from ten to twenty feet or more, and among which lurked five thousand keen-eyed enemy. In the morning we found him pegged out, spread-eagle-wise, on his face. They had mutilated him in the beastly Frontier fashion, then slashed his

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back with their knives, and finally lit a fire over his kidneys. It was smouldering when we came.

The fact that, like those who did these things to him, he was a Mohammedan made no difference to them.

That is the Trans-Frontier way.

## KASHMIR



## XXXIII

### *The Girl I Bought*

The *manji*, or Kashmiri boatman, is a despicable type of Mohammedan. Physically powerful, he is a coward and a pimp, and a sordid one at that.

*Extract from my Kashmir diary*

HAVING brought on a bout of fever through sitting in a bath with a 50-lb. lump of ice when the thermometer in Nowshera cantonments was somewhere over the hundred, it seemed good to take sixty days' privilege leave in Kashmir.

Two days' tonga<sup>1</sup> journey from Rawalpindi brought me to Baramulla, where I found the houseboat *Pearl*—chartered by letter—moored to the river-bank. Built of unpainted brown wood, her gay chintz curtains fluttering at her windows and the Jhelum river sparkling against a background of dark green trees beyond, she made a pretty picture. Never in my life was I so glad to see a boat. One has to experience the dusty torture of a similar tonga journey to appreciate the contrast.

At the head of the gangway plank stood the *manji*, or head boatman, his numerous family ranged behind him. He was a huge man with a greasy skull-cap and an immense black beard. They all looked incredibly dirty. The women's costume consisted of a long, loose gown, hanging in one fall to their ankles, and a low cap with a white cloth hanging mantilla-wise from it down their backs. The one unmarried girl wore her hair in numerous little plaits, joined together and continued to the fashionable length by cords and tassels.

A rattling of ropes and chains and we were off.

Lying there in a long cane chair, listening to the lap and gurgle of the water, was a joy too luxurious to be rendered

<sup>1</sup> A small two-wheeled carriage drawn by a pair of ponies



## *Indian Mosaic*

into words. The insistent *clang-clang-clang-clang* of that jolting tonga-bar seemed like an infinitely far-away recollection of a nightmare.

The *manju* and his two sons poled the boat punt-wise. Up and down the gunwale they plodded, grunting "*Dhusgee!*" in unison each time they set the pole-ends against their chests. "*Dhusgee,*" by the same token, is the name of their patron saint.

Next morning I was awakened by the piping of a pair of yellow-vented *bul-buls*, or Kashmiri nightingales. They had perched on a chair-back and a curtain-rod respectively, and their sweet thin notes sounded like a song of welcome. Outside was the comfortable lapping of water and the windy rustle of trees; but though it was windy there was no dust. A tang of mingled wood-smoke and coffee floated in, and my bedroom smelt of cedar-wood. A houseboat slid by on the swift current and its *manju* hailed my *manju*, whose answer was a deep bass mutter. Believing I was asleep, he had refrained from hailing back. Like almost every Kashmiri boatman, he had a caged Afghan lark and I could hear it singing. For me a lark's song is sweeter than a nightingale's, although they say that a nightingale sings divinely when it leans against a thorn that, in the end, pierces its heart.

Kashmir is easily the most beautiful country in the world, and I hope very devoutly that I shall see it again before I die. If I were able to return, perhaps certain poignant memories would inspire me to write of things that are now locked away in the prison-treasury of my mind.

A barber came on board to cut my hair, a wizened little man who greeted me in bad Persian. He said his name was Mohammed Julloo, that he cut corns, knew all about massage, and was a poet. He recited one of his poems, and at the end of it presented me with a basket of luscious black cherries. Then he began operations. . . .

## *The Girl I Bought*

A squall revealed Bluebeard in his true character. Seeing it coming, heralded by dark-grey ruffles on the water a quarter of a mile away, he fell on his knees and bellowed to Allah. I happened to be on the roof. I knew nothing much about anchoring houseboats, and nothing at all about their manœuvring; but I did know that they are top-heavy and have no keel. So I cursed him roundly and made him get up. Forgetting Allah for the moment, he roared at his sons to bring poles, and cuffed them soundly when they brought them. Pandemonium followed. Sheets of rain swept down; my servants clambered on board from the servants' boat and started to bang windows, laughing delightedly. The boatmen "*Dhusgee'd*" like Titans, their women-folk shrilling at them what sounded extremely like abuse. I can hear, now, the sharp rattle of the silver straws of the rain as they beat upon the side of the boat.

In Srinagar we moored in the Chenar Bagh-- the anchorage allotted for 'bachelor' boats. Mensalubs and 'bachelors' nautches are incompatible. The weather had broken. It rained continuously, and I fretted and fumed. Sitting with a book by the little open fire in the drawing-room palled at the end of the first day. The fishing was bad; but my temper was worse. Was there *anything* to be shot or caught, *anywhere*? I asked Bluebeard, called in in consultation.

"What would the Presence like to do?" He was irritatingly huge in the little drawing-room, and on the Bluebeard portion of him drops of rain glistened.

"I will do anything! . . . What *is* there to do?"

He thought hard.

"What does the Presence do in India when it rains?"

"I read. . . . But I don't want to read! Get ready the small *shikara*.<sup>1</sup> I will fish for *mahseer*<sup>2</sup> under the bridge

<sup>1</sup> A canoe-like dinghy

<sup>2</sup> The Indian carp. It attains a great size, and sometimes weighs 80 lb., and even more.

## Indian Mosaic

upstream.... And don't smoke that reeking hookah of yours again when the wind is this way! Do you understand?"

"*Malum! Bohut achchha, sahib!*" (That eternal phrase!)

After casting for two hours in a deluge, the desultory conversation of the drenched elicited from my crew of one the fact that four miles downstream . . .

"Go to that place!"

"But me no buts," is the equivalent of my reply to his "*Lakin, sahib!*"

When near the houseboat stentorian discharges of vocal fireworks were let off. His father out-bellowed the Bull of Bashan, and the lad made as if to run alongside the *Pearl*.

"Go straight on!"

We went straight on. We should, of course, have taken on board an extra paddle for the up-stream journey home. That was what the fireworks were about.

Like the previous half-dozen, that last expedition also was fishless. Then came the weary hours of paddling back, hugging the river-bank. I don't believe there had ever been a *mahseer* within ten miles of us; and I have also absolutely no doubt that the maximum of human ineptitude is reached when a European tries to use one of those futilely picturesque, heart-shaped Kashmiri canoe paddles, which twiddle in the water like egg-whisks.

"Why didn't the *manji* send some one down to help you?" I demanded in cold fury, wringing out a soaked coat-sleeve. "You told him where we were going, didn't you? You—tell—your—father——"

"*Bohut achchha. . .*"

The rain had stopped by the time we got back, and the night sky was like a cloth of blue velvet on which had been spilled a stupendous collection of fire-filled gems. A scent of flowers filled the rain-washed air, and over the tops of the gossiping chenar-trees the full moon was rising, a huge globe of soft orange light.

## *The Girl I Bought*

For one brief moment I wondered why the boat was lighted up. My bearer had asked for leave until the next morning . . . "to see my uncle, sahib."

"*Garm pānī lao! Khana lao!*" ("A hot bath! Food!")

Entering the living-room, I might have blundered into a tale from the *Arabian Nights*. Sitting cross-legged under the biggest of the Chinese lanterns, on a chintz cushion set in the middle of the floor, was a young Kashmiri girl in a trousered costume of green.

Despite the wide gravity of a pair of brown eyes darkened with antimony, she was evidently little more than a child.

We stared at each other. She was trembling. Apparently moveless, the silver bracelets on her arms were chinking faintly, and a little metal 'bugle' suspended between her eyes was tremulous.

"Who are you?" I am ashamed to say the question was not politely put.

"I am called Ameena. This is my mother's sister." With a sideways movement she indicated a sheeted crone whose wrinkled and sunken lips were ceaselessly moving. I had not noticed her.

The sheeted lady salaamed several times in rapid succession, and muttered something unintelligible. Senile decay! It would be useless to talk to her.

Again I addressed the girl. "Why have you come?" (I heard her whisper under her breath the word "*Allah!*").

"My father sent me. The *manji* said that the Presence wanted me. . . ."

The truth that rang in her voice and shone in her eyes roused a savage fury against the *manji*.

"I did not send him for you! I know nothing about it!"

Mistaking the cause of my anger, before I could prevent her she had thrown herself at my feet.

"Do not beat me, Lord-sahib! Be pleased to let me stay!"

## Indian Mosaic

If I go before sunrise he will beat me!" The hands clasped about my ankles shook.

"Who will beat you?" ('To beat,' 'to abuse'—how common those verbs are in India!)

"Your *manji*, sahib! . . . Shall I dance for you, sahib?"

Phaeton in the swaying chariot of the sun never wrestled more fiercely with his maddened steeds than I with runaway thoughts at that moment. . . . I had heard of these things, of course.

Something had got to be done! But what? . . . ("What would the sahib like to do? . . . "I will do anything!" . . . So *that* was it!)

I fetched a box of chocolate-almonds from the side-board.

Her story was pitiable enough, but I knew that every word of it was true. Her father embroidered small articles with iridescent beetles' wings. He had eye-sickness. Her mother was dead. They had no food. They owed a hundred rupees to a Marwari moneylender who had threatened to turn them out of their 'house.' So the father had agreed to sell his daughter—temporarily. ("What else could he do, sahib?")

The beldame, when appealed to, moved forward on her hams, Indian-fashion, and, stroking the victim's hair, expatiated on her gentleness and general desirability. I could have slapped her.

I sent for the *manji*.

Yes, it was true. He had fetched the girl, thinking to please me. Other sahibs did such things. He hitched contemptuously the dirty padded quilt about his shoulders—she was a virgin, and for *three* hundred rupees—

Huge as he was, I would have thrashed him—not so much for the way he spoke, but because of that profit of 200 rupees. But she was staying at Kashmir and I was returning to India. Also, I might easily be asked to send in my resignation as the result of a *fracas* in a native state.

## *The Girl I Bought*

I bade him go at once and fetch her father and the money-lender. "If they're asleep, wake them! Until I have seen them she and this old woman stay here. Tell the cook to prepare curry and rice!"

Some hours later her father and the Marwari spider arrived. Shylock took a lot less than a hundred rupees in settlement, and even provided the two-anna stamp. Her father, scared out of his wits, swore that Ameena should be honourably married. Two years later I heard that he had carried out his promise.

When they had gone a chintz cushion under the biggest of the Chinese lanterns seemed strangely empty.

I had given orders for the boat to be moved at sunrise; I wanted to get away from those gossiping chenars. I think the child understood when she heard me give the order. The Dal lake was prettier, she said. . . .

Standing on the roof of the houseboat, I looked into the dense morning mist, thankful for its blankness. The cool clamminess of it was curiously soothing.

"*Dhusgee!*" . . . We were off!

At the entrance to the beautiful Apple-tree Canal that leads into the Dal lake the mist lifted from the glassy surface of the water like an immense blanket of cotton-wool, revealing a sight I shall never forget.

Fifty yards away lay a small boat containing three people—the girl, her father, and the crone. They were kneeling with clasped hands lifted to Heaven.

Midway between us a fish splashed.

Then, thank God, the mist hid them.

*At, Dhusgee!*

## XXXIV

### *The Guru*

Whatever thou lovest, Man, that too, become thou must,  
God, if thou lovest God; dust, if thou lovest dust.

JOHANN SCHLEIFER, *Cherubic Pilgrim*

It was shortly after this that I met my guru—Srī Swami Sant Dev Saroop, Guru Maharaj—one of the spiritual advisers of the then Ruler of Kashmir.

Now, those to whom a guru opens the doors of his wisdom do not keep notes of the deeper things he says. It is neither permitted nor desired. Commenting upon this, he said:

“There are certain truths which no words can explain. Christ said as much to his disciples. A suitable comprehension of them comes to the mind that is ready to receive them. The teacher merely plants in the mind of the *chela*<sup>1</sup> an ‘unopened’ idea, and if there is soil it will grow. A germinating seed may not be uncovered.”

Hence this chapter and the two which follow it by no means contain all that he said, but only the sense of it. The truths connoted could be developed—substantially at least—by a Hindu philosopher; a fuller development of them could be given only by a guru. I am neither.

I am merely an ex-officer of the Indian Army who still occasionally finds pleasure in remembering the glassy polish of his leather accoutrements and burnished buttons, and to whom a suggestion to write a book on India brought a sudden realization that was the more painful because it was tardy in coming: namely, that his eyes had been closed when they

<sup>1</sup> A ‘disciple’ Julius Caesar mentions the *chelus* of the Druids “as being, for the most part, lusty young fellows of twenty-five years and upwards”

## *The Guru*

should have been open. "Some one I loved passed by when I was asleep, and I knew not."

A friend having joined me, I left the houseboat and camped at a place called Achibal. There we decided to wait for news of black bear in the surrounding mountains. Our shikaree had been out looking for them for two days, and might return at any moment.

The dogs and I wandered into the ruins of Achibal Bagh, one of the old Mogul gardens for which Kashmir is famous. Four centuries ago it was the "Hearts Delight" of the flower-loving Mogul conqueror of Hindustan who gave India one of the most beautiful gardens in the world. As an impertinent aside, I would remark that it seems to be the mournful fate of India never to choose her own kings.

Over this garden broods the sadness that is the inseparable shadow of diminished glory. Of all its terraces but two remain. Its "pearl-showering fountains" no longer play, and around the bent and broken brotherhood of their thousand jets (Persia speaks in that) there float no more the blue lotuses of Vishna or the white ones of Siva. Four centuries back, on hot summer nights the graceful ladies of the harem,<sup>1</sup> their slim young bodies gleaming like polished ivory, used to splash the cool water over each other as they played like water-nymphs in the central pool. Now the only creatures that splash in it are frogs. On the nights of the naked ladies the waters of the great cascade used to thunder down in a curving shawl of water that drew tincturing colours from the little lamps of red, blue, and green glass that flickered frightenedly in the niches cut beneath it. To-day the fall still thunders, but the smoke-stained niches are empty; perhaps what one takes to be reflections of the stars in its crystalline curve are the shivering ghosts of lamps for ever dead. . . . In those far-off days the apple- and quince-

<sup>1</sup> From the Arabic *haram*, a sacred place



## Indian Mosaic

trees were cared for, and the shallow water-courses into which they still drop amorous blossoms in the spring were paved with blue tiles. The cooling spray of fountains drifted through shapely archways like silver mist; but those arches are broken, and the mists of morning are afraid of the sun, and one day is like another day.

In the clear dawn before the east was red  
Before the rose had torn her veil in two,  
A nightingale through Hāfiz' garden flew,  
Stayed but to fill its song with tears, and fled.<sup>1</sup>

I was told much by the old keeper of the garden. We were mutually sympathetic, I think, and used to chat standing by the spring-source. His pathetic eulogies of this dilapidated pleasance, from whose water-courses the sky seemed to have stolen that Persian blue, won my heart.

One morning he showed me, proudly, a rosebush which he had planted on a small mound; and I, full of the knowledge I had gained by reading somebody's *Gardening in India*, suggested off-handedly that the bush would have borne better blooms if it had been planted in level ground.

Gently but firmly my ignorance was enlightened: Lailee<sup>2</sup> rode upon a camel; the rosebush was Lailee; the mound was her camel.

"Is it a deep red rose?" I asked, certain that it would be, insomuch as the story was of a passionate love.

"It is white. White flowers are best. In the night-time they can be seen; and in the moonlight their colour is unchanged."

For a consideration the old fellow, who had a certain resemblance to a gnarled fruit-tree, brought me peaches and watercress every morning from the orchard.

On the day I first met the guru clouds of butterflies, like coloured snow, were fluttering round the plane-trees. Somebody thought they were the souls of flowers that other and

<sup>1</sup> From *The Diwān-i Hāfiz*

<sup>2</sup> One of the many Indian "Juliets"

## *The Guru*

more ancient summers had borne, and which had come to hover over their desecrated beds.

In spite of the altitude the sun was hot, and the prospect of sitting under rustling trees by the ice-cold mountain stream that flows through the garden was compellingly alluring. I wanted to finish a poem I had written about a sunset on the Dal lake; there it could be muttered over and polished without incurring the gibes of one who was a soldier in the completest sense of that resonant word. My friend had "no use for poetry," and withering was his contempt for the makers of it.

For a while I sat in the ruined central archway above the fall, reading a pocket edition of the *Faerie Queene*. The dogs, having no nonsensical ideas about frogs possibly being transformed ladies of the harem, snapped up small batrachians, and thereafter, to my most entire satisfaction, foamed bubblingly at the mouth and shook their heads till their teeth rattled.

After an hour of that the three of us wandered aimlessly.

Suddenly we came upon an imposing-looking Brahmin, apparently about fifty years of age, sitting under a leafy plane-tree. His white-robed figure, seen against the silvery smoothness of the bole, looked like a painting of the Buddha. He had the same high forehead and faint, inscrutable smile. Seated in front of him in a semicircle were a number of Indians. They too were dressed in white robes; but it seemed as if the thinnest of grey mists lay over them, although they were in the sunlight, and he in the shade of the tree.

For some reason or other I could never bring myself to wear sun-glasses, and what I saw was, of course, merely a curious effect of sunlight and shadow which gave the impression that a radiance emanated from the central figure. To-day it is by the cool light of such a radiance that I see, clearly, many things that then were hidden from me, and

## *Indian Mosaic*

remember many things that are more precious to me than gold or silver.

Clean-shaven even to his head, and wearing a toga-like garment draped over one high shoulder, he was thrumming a seven-stringed *sitar* and chanting, rather harshly, a Sanskrit song. A *sitar* is an instrument with a flat keyboard-handle some four feet long, at the end of which is the shell of a dried yellow pumpkin. His voice had something in it of the thin resonance of a lightly-tapped cymbal.

Quite evidently, he was some one of importance. Probably a famous poet, I thought.

One of his audience drew his attention to my presence, and he glanced up.

I experienced a strange feeling in that moment: I felt as if I were looking through a window that opened on to infinity. Mingled with this, was an instant determination to know this dominating personality. Normally, I should have gone straight up to him; but something held me back. For the first time in my life, standing there, I saw a clear-cut picture of myself as I really was: a well-meaning, muddled product of a systemless education and wide but unplanned reading; self-indulgent; abysmally ignorant of the humanities; impulsive; and without the slightest spiritual significance. Above all, I was conscious of having no spiritual objective and of a sudden desire to find one.

"The *guru-jī* wishes that you should go to him." The stout Hindu had evidently been sent by the *sitar*-player.

Sternly admonishing Lion, who was given to behaving like a hooligan at social functions, I approached—to be met with a smile the sweetness of which remains with me even to-day.

Now, at this period of my life, my attitude towards the religions of India and their guardians was that of most British officers: one of respectful indifference. When, therefore, as I seated myself by his side, the guru announced simply and decisively that he was receiving a visit from a

## *The Guru*

"*Mahatma*," the word meant nothing to me, nor does it even to-day, in this connexion; I record it only because it was his manner of introducing me.

Producing, against all hope, a dog-eared visiting-card, I explained that I was an Army officer on leave and that I was bear-hunting. His eyes compelled frankness; but somehow I disliked mentioning the bear-hunting.

"What harm have the *bhaloo-log* [bear-people] done to you?"

I was glad to be able to mention that I had a pet bear-cub chained to my tent-pole at that moment; and that a few days before I had come upon a big *bhaloo* up a tree, cramming mulberries into its mouth with both paws, and had found it impossible to shoot because the beast was so thoroughly enjoying itself. I felt suddenly and deeply grateful to that bear!

He nodded approvingly, and said I must show him the bear-cub. Then, clapping his hands, he ordered tea to be brought. While we were waiting for it he looked at me so amusedly that I asked him why he was smiling.

"I have seen you before!" This time he spoke in passable English.

"Where did you see me?"

"In my own way," he said, chuckling to himself, as if at a good joke. His keen sense of humour was a joy.

The tea was brought in cups set on a bright tin tray embossed with big profiles of the King and Queen. It was pale pink in colour, and each cup stood in a footbath of its own liquor, which experience had taught me would be sickeningly sweet and redolent of spices. In another saucer were some biscuits covered with sugar-icing and innumerable flies.

To comply with etiquette, I drank some of the tea with a loud sucking noise and smacked my lips after each sip.

"Do you know why you came here?" asked the guru, gravely, waving away some of the flies. His caste forbade him to eat with me.

## *Indian Mosaic*

I did not know. Puzzled, I gazed at the pine-covered slopes and listened to the cold thunder of the waterfall a hundred paces away. But no satisfactory answer would come.

"Because I was hot, I suppose," I said at length.

He laughed. "Do you understand Sanskrit?"

"No; only Persian, Pushtu, and Urdu."

"Then, will you not please stay for a few days, and teach me a little Persian?" He told me who he was, and repeated the invitation.

"I shall be glad to stay." By way of giving a sample of my teaching capabilities, I slid into some Persian couplets:<sup>1</sup>

Whosoever comes into a new house,  
Goes, and the house falls into the hands of another.

Whosoever earns his bread by the sweat of his brow,  
Owes no gratitude to the Hatim Tacc.<sup>2</sup>

Suddenly I heard my Scots friend asking what the hell I was doing: our shikaree had reported two bears fourteen miles up the valley, and we were to start at once. Were we? His matter-of-fact Highland voice jerked me back to sahibdom. I looked, first at him, and then at the guru—who seemed slightly amused—with an aggravating sense of helplessness. A trying situation became tense when I was asked whether I would be ready to start next week. I replied that I was not coming at all.

"He wants me to teach him Persian," I hedged, looking up at my angry friend. It sounded unconvincing, even to me; but then the whole situation seemed unreal.

The argument then became deckle-edged. But I was firm. Hugging my knees, I pointed out that we had agreed before starting that we should be free to separate without notice, if one of us wanted to. Had not the stores been packed in two lots to meet such an eventuality? They had; and that was all there was to be said about it.

<sup>1</sup> From Sadi's *Gulistan*.

<sup>2</sup> The fabulously rich man of Persian legend

## *The Guru*

But it wasn't. My brother officer had a good deal more to say; and, having said it, apostrophized all the gods of Scotland and England, and left me, his pipe tilted to heaven and fury perched upon his shoulders.

I sat glooming at my hunting sandals of woven grass—wondering.

The *sitar* thrummed and throbbed softly. The song was resumed.

Having once more complied with India's custom and eaten with my spoon the last grains of sugar at the bottom of my tea-cup, I stood up and did something I had never done before—not in this life, at any rate. I joined my palms on my chest in the Hindu manner and asked leave to depart.

If my companion had seen me at that moment he would probably have insisted on calling in a doctor; and I don't know that I would have considered him wrong. He could hardly be expected to understand what I knew with certainty to be true; namely, that this man was spiritually my master, and that my whole life had moved towards this meeting.

The guru put down the *sitar*.

"Come, I will show you your new house!"

He led the way to a small stone summer-house built on the bridge that spanned the waterfall.

"Will you not have your things moved in here? It will be cooler for you, and you will be nearer to me."

The carved lattice-work windows were damp with spray from the fall, and the air inside was filled with the scent of wet cedar-wood.

## XXXV

### *Wisdom Speaks*

Know thyself, and thou wilt know the universe and the  
gods

*Inscription on the Temple of Delphi*

SHORTLY after sunset a dinner of vegetables—*brinjals*, potatoes, and pulses—was brought to me. Swimming in butter after the Indian manner and served on circular plates made of sewn plantain leaves, it was part of his own meal, and therefore the highest compliment he could pay me. He had explained that a Brahmin may not dine at sunset, since that is one of his times for prayer.

An hour later I joined him in the garden. Two of his *chelas* (disciples) were with him—delightful Bengali youths with the faces of medieval saints and the bearing of princes. The Indian, when he walks for enjoyment, loves company, and cannot understand why the Englishman generally prefers to walk alone.

Seated at the head of the fall, we spoke hardly at all of Persian, drifting from a discussion on fairies, which my reading of Spenser had prompted me to start, into a talk on beliefs and religion.

"Explain to me why all the faiths of the West are based on selfish considerations," he said. "My *chela*, Shankar Dev, holds that Christianity is selfish because its main teaching is the winning of material and spiritual advantages by the individual as a reward for his devotion to God.

"Are not Hindu *sadhus* selfish, then, since they are concerned with the saving of their individual souls?" I felt that it was rather a neat question.

"You are thinking of Nirvana. Nirvana, in Sanskrit,

## Wisdom Speaks

means 'extinguished,' 'put out.' An Indian speaks of an untamed elephant being *anirvana*—that is, a beast in which the joy that is independence is still unquenched. Nirvana in the religious sense, may become a selfish ideal if it induces a merely passive attitude to life and prevents a man who has not withdrawn from the world doing active good. The Ajivika sect of the early Buddhists were such men, and the Buddha denounced them for it. We have ascetics who voluntarily renounce all thought of entering Heaven, and all desire to enter Heaven, in order that they may be better able to serve humanity. Those of us who know regard Nirvana as a blessed goal of endless—and possibly active—peace. The One and Lasting that follows that which is divisible and passing. But it does not mean the annihilation of the individual soul. When the dewdrop slips into the ocean *the atoms composing it remain its atoms*. In that sense, 'Love is immortal.' "

To-day I see how curiously the latest researches of science confirm what he said. We are advancing in our science, and standing still in our ethics.

"Christianity teaches a universal love," I objected.

He shook his head.

"Universal love does not exist in the West. You are only half-Christianized. Yet your missionaries tell us Hindus—who really do love one another—that we follow a religion that is false! . . . Why do not Englishmen have a personal guru? Even to learn a trade an apprenticeship under a master is necessary! "

I recalled my youthful and infrequent catechism lessons and realized that the most important thing in life was the very thing I knew least about. But some defence seemed necessary. "The Englishman's guru is the Bible," was my attempt.

He regarded me gravely.

"Truth can only come from within ourselves. It is not



## Indian Mosaic

contained in any book. Books can only outline truth, and give rules and methods."

"But scientific truths are contained in books, *guru-ji!*"

"The marvels of science teach us to believe in God. Some of your savants realize this. There should be no conflict between science and religion. Of all the sciences religion is the highest and deepest. I know of your Oliver Lodge." (He pronounced it "Olver Lōj.") "Perhaps one day the Western world will reverence him as a second Moses!"

For a minute or two there was silence, save for the croaking of the frogs in the fountain tank. A servant brought him a hubble-bubble pipe.<sup>1</sup> Why did I not use one, he asked, since they were so much cooler than the short pipe I smoked?

I said that I hoped he would go on talking about the things he had been explaining to us.

The *chelas* looked at me in astonishment. But how was I to know that every word a guru speaks is precious and to be listened to with respect and gratitude, no matter what the subject might be? Or, that since the days of the great Manu it had been held a sin to attempt to instruct a Brahmin . . . "saying, 'you ought to do so and so.'" And that, in ancient times such presumption had been punishable under that same Manu's code by the pouring of boiling oil into the mouth and ears of the offender? Of these things I knew nothing.

For some minutes he remained silent and quite motionless. Then, glancing up at a heaven ablaze with stars, he said:

"A thought has come to me. Perhaps this great universe with all those worlds and planets is merely the contents of a single corpuscle (*q'ttra*) of the blood-stream of creation, which is rushing with incredible swiftness through the veins of eternity!"

The remark made one of his audience recall a teeming

<sup>1</sup> Adepts, when they have reached a certain stage of spiritual advancement, are not affected by anything they do, and are free to smoke, etc.

## Wisdom Speaks

drop of pond-water he had once seen through a microscope. . . . "Eternity in a grain of sand; all Heaven in a flower."

There were, he continued, higher reasons for belief than the mere evidence of the bodily senses. To sense truth instinctively is even higher than attaining it. Science should admit that only the heart can know the deeper truths. Love, the highest of the human emotions, was outside the intellect. He would teach me how to practise simple Yoga, so that I should understand more of these truths.

The thought of being discovered in cantonments sitting cross-legged in meditation paralysed my imagination.

"I won't have much time for it, I'm afraid!"

"As a pony shies at a piece of paper blown by the wind, so is the unprepared mind when it encounters the truth," he remarked quietly. "Concentration is necessary. You can practise it anywhere. The exercises I shall show you will be few and easy. It is meditation that is important. The highest result of Yoga—*Samadhi*—can be attained without yogic exercises, if the heart and soul be ready and intense meditation be practised."

I smiled. In India cross-eyed yogis are as common as blackberries in Sussex. Was not all this 'meditation' so much self-assertion, and the whole business of these yogis nothing more than a sort of higher selfishness?

"You like some of your thoughts to become realities, do you not?" The gravity of his steady gaze troubled me. Discipline was my god in those days, and, being perhaps over-fond of my Mule Corps, I pronounced with complacent pompousness a firm belief in Self-expression: "every one's work should mirror the doer of it"; and so forth.

It was his turn to smile.

"Surely self-expression is only good if the self be rightly ordered? If one cannot command one's self, is one fit to command others? Self-transcendence is what matters. The

## *Indian Mosaic*

All lies beyond self. It is obvious. But the intellect, which is finite, cannot comprehend the All that is Brahma, or Truth, or Infinity. Meditation is the opening of a door by which we let into our consciousness the realization that Truth *is in us*. Once that realization has come, ignorance and error are obliterated as walls of sand are washed away by the sea. That is the nature of Truth. Leave the correcting to it. Concentrate on letting more consciousness of it enter into you. Only Truth is lasting. 'Only in that which is lasting can there be lasting happiness.' The knowledge must transcend the knower."

"Then, the only really happy people are the yogis!"

"Any man who truly and consistently longs to know Brahma will attain to some degree of wisdom. Ultimately, it will lift him and bring him to peace. The calm of infinite peace is eternal happiness."

"And free-will? Is one to surrender that?"

"Have I not said: Unless Brahma be *longed for*, it will not become apparent?"

A mention of the Christian doctrine of the redemption was swept away with:

"The God that is in each of us is our redeemer. A man must, himself, redeem the faults he has committed. Yet, in the human sense of the word, there is no 'self.'"

About reincarnation I remember him saying:

"Krishna said, 'Death is certain for him who is born; birth is certain for him who dies. Spiritually, Birth is Death. Death is a spiritual resurrection.' That is the law of reincarnation, which, in turn is governed by the law of *Karma*—the consequences of our deeds in previous incarnations. As a calf finds its mother, so do the consequences of a man's acts come lowing to him across the fields of Time."

After we had walked awhile one of the *chelas* asked him if he were tired. "I am never tired," he answered. And I remembered that my Punjabi-Mohammedan orderly had

## Wisdom Speaks

told me that the people of the village had said that the "*Swami-ji*"—whom they swore was more than two hundred years old—never lay down to sleep, but sat up with his eyes closed.

"What is the first thing a *chela* is taught by his guru?" I asked, wondering inwardly whether he would mind if I smoked.

"To see God in his teacher; and to enter into himself. Only so can he know himself. *Atmanam atmuna pashyay!* [See the soul only by the soul!] The striving of the Self *for itself* must be transcended. The yogi must realize that he is an inseparable—but individual—part of the whole. . . . Yoga, as you know, means 'union.' We will speak more of these things to-morrow. . . . Why do you not smoke, if you want to?"

He asked me why I was not married. I said I intended to marry very shortly. He did not seem to think I was wise in my intention, and I remarked that if I had had a guru I might not have taken that decision.

"A guru can only show the way that leads up that mighty mountain, the attainment of knowledge. The *chela* himself must do the climbing. . . ."

The talk turned on women and marriage. He spoke with great frankness on the Hindu view of the sex question, which he said was dealt with in many of the Aryan books. He praised highly the Indian wife, and pointed out that man should love woman with all his heart and strength, or entirely renounce intercourse. Love between two people should grow by degrees from youth onward, for that was better than a brief explosion of adult passion which passes and leaves unhappiness. He asked me whether I knew the percentage of divorces in America. Hindus, of course, have no divorce, the nobility of woman and the sacredness of the wife and mother being doctrines.

"There is very little, if any, domestic unhappiness among

## *Indian Mosaic*

our people," he said. "A parent is not only honoured by the children, but by the entire village." In support of this he quoted one of the laws of Manu: "One mother is equal in reverence to a thousand fathers." A son, even if he is a prince, has to touch his mother's knees whenever he returns home; and one of the greatest of the Maharajahs to-day insists on his subjects carrying out the immemorial custom of touching his knees whenever they are admitted into his presence. . . .

I should read Manu in a good English translation, the guru added; but I was to take no notice of the penalties that it ordained should be inflicted for offences against the Brahmins; "they are both obsolete and false."

Encouraged by his agreeing that the Hindu view of the sex relations was entirely unromantic, I asked him if he would explain why they brought sexual matters into religion.

"We are sane realists," he said. "Our philosophy praises the joys of physical union, but remembers its holiness. It enjoins that man in his daily life should realize that he is in a way, a god, and that the need for reproduction is not intended to be used merely as an excuse for sensual pleasure, but is a decree of Brahma and the Law of Life. We have a god of reproduction—Siva. . . . He is only the destroyer of forms—the changer of them. Thus, he is even Time. He is the Regenerator *and* the Destroyer—two aspects of the same power. The seed is destroyed or changed that it may become the child or the flower. A man is born to beget children. In a mystical sense, he is Siva."

"Then why is it right to renounce women?"

He looked directly at me. "Only a fool would refuse to give up the lesser for the greater! Again I speak only in the mystic sense. Misused or debased, mysticism may turn into sex obsession. That is why certain forms of Yoga are dangerous. Bhakti Yoga, for instance. A guru is always necessary."

The dawn was breaking when I rose to go to bed.

## *Wisdom Speaks*

The guru regarded the crimson glow. "When we see that light we say that 'The tiger of the dawn has clawed the elephant of the night!' It is a quotation from one of our poets."

Alone in my summer-house, I made notes of our conversation, despite the hour. My diary for that day ends as follows:

I have learned that a self which I cordially hate is to be my study because there is nothing higher than 'a perfect knowledge of the One that is Self.' . . .

Written across the pages is "It is not going to be easy," which, for me, was prescient.

Drifting into sleep, I wondered whether my decision to tell the guru about the "Lady of the Miniature" was sensible?

The thunder of the fall sounded like applause.

## XXXVI

### *An Interruption*

Evolution is the law of Life,  
Number is the law of the Universe,  
Unity is the law of God.<sup>1</sup>

A FEW days later we climbed up the mountain-side and sat talking among the pines, looking down into the valley. On the way I saw men and women kiss the imprints of his wooden sandals in the dust. They loved him, just as the birds and animals loved him. Tame though the Kashmir *bul-bul* is, it does not usually perch upon one's shoulder. And a squirrel played between his feet. He was as pleased as a child, watching it, and told me with grave disapproval that Indian artists used the hairs of a squirrel's tail to make their brushes.

I think he knew that I was anxious to begin practising Yoga, for without any request from me he started to speak of it. He said that Yoga was known long before Christ, who was Himself a master teacher of Yoga. The mind must be concentrated on itself, as a man concentrates on the untying of a knot in a rope; it must seek to understand that it is part of the Oneness that is All. By degrees, the guru-instructed yogi becomes master of his body and its functions and ceases to be its slave. In this dominating of the body by the mind there are three stages. The first is called *dharana*, or the fixing of the mind; the second *dhyana*, or meditation; and the third, and highest, *samadhi*—the complete absorption of the mind in God.

“When I say ‘the mind’ I am not speaking of the brain,

<sup>1</sup> This inscription was on the fly-leaf of a second-hand copy of *The Code of Manu* which I purchased. It also bore the name of an “F. C. Channing”—quite unknown to me—who was apparently a member of the Bengal Civil Service in 1899.

## *An Interruption*

remember. I am speaking of that uncomprehended power which enables the brain to think. *That* is the mind; the brain is only a medium. Mind is outside all that is not itself. . . . The great philosopher and mystic, Sankhaya, compares the body and the soul to a nautch-girl dancing before a King; when she has finished her dance she disappears, and the King is left alone in his majesty. So is the mind left when the body passes. . . . Is it not a good image? "

I mentioned Sadi's comparison of the body to a bony cage in which lives 'the bird of Life whose name is Breath.'

He smiled whimsically. "I would rather say that we are drops of the soul-ocean that is God! The dew cannot refuse to rise towards the sun. . . ." He sat silently telling his beads, his lips moving in prayer. Suddenly he looked at me. "Some of your poets are yogis. Did you know that? . . . Does Shakespeare speak of Yoga? "

I searched my memory, and quoted "It is the mind that makes the body rich," hoping he would not ask me where it was to be found.

Once again he smiled.

"Buddha said that, to his disciple Ananda, two thousand years before Shakespeare! 'The mind is everything, Ananda. That which you think, that you will become.' . . . But even the Buddha was only quoting from the Vedas, written perhaps thousands of years before he was born! "

"If I think Nothingness, do I become Nothingness? "

"Those of his order who came after Buddha invented that idea. There is no Nothingness. Therefore, you cannot think it. How could there be, when there is God? If God is real, He can be realized. That realization of Iswara, the personal Godhead, is one of the objects of Yoga."

"Western philosophers say that the Hindu philosophy is too dreamy to be of practical use," I submitted.

"A dream can embody a truth. The *Upanishads* teach us that man is a creator when he dreams. One can be a yogi,



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and still do one's work in the world. Yoga can help one's work. Paul knew "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Was he not both a yogi and a man of action? Your Bible tells of many such instances. . . . Yoga is the way to that peace. . . . The only realities for us are surely the things, or states, which our senses perceive? Thought—the highest sense of all—functions during sleep. Now, if we think of life as a dream, does it not make it easier to live? . . . Listen! Life has been compared to a man walking through a rose garden; before him a slave holds up a carpet worked with strange designs; another slave holds up a similar carpet behind him. Those carpets are the Future and the Past. On the man's either hand is the Present. . . . The meaning of the parable is this: It is useless to see the Past. If we do our true best in the Present, then the Future can only be—must be—what God wishes to make of what we have done. Let us therefore be happy in making the Present beautiful!"

He was speaking about time and the possibility of God existing in "an eternal Present," when we were interrupted by one of his *chelas*, who said that an American missionary and his wife were waiting to see the *Swami-ji*. Two messengers had also come from H.H. the Maharajah to ask his advice on a State problem and his interpretation of a dream which the Prince had had the previous night.

The missionary was indulgently sceptical. He explained that he had come to investigate "the Sanskrit magic *mantrams*." "Charms," he called them, and asked to be told "a selection of them," that he might "put them to the test."

*Mantram* means, literally, 'counsel' (a *mantri* is a 'counsellor') and is derived from *matr*, 'to repeat in the mind,' from which root it is possible that our own word 'mutter' may have come. A portion of the Hindu scriptures called the *Mantram Shastra* deals with these magical phrases, and

## *An Interruption*

mentions, among many others, the *Marun mantram*, which causes death, and the *Doochatun mantram*, which causes injury.

While he was speaking the guru looked at the missionary intently, and gave an order to one of his *chelas*, who thereupon brought a cheaply framed oleograph of the god Ganesh, and handed it to the American. A certain Sanskrit *mantram* was to be repeated in front of the picture, the guru said, in the quiet of the missionary's bedroom. In a week he would please call again and report progress.

Before the week was out the missionary's wife came to implore the guru's help on behalf of her husband (who was unquestionably a strict teetotaler) as he had twisted an ankle and was greatly distressed by swarms of blue rats which he saw running about the room. All rats are sacred to Ganesh; but the heavenly rats are conventionally blue. Perhaps the American hypnotized himself by constant repetitions of the *mantram* in front of the picture of Ganesh, in which, by the way, no rat was portrayed. On the other hand, a level-headed, strong-minded, highly-educated American is not likely to allow himself to be affected by empty words connoting nothing serious. The *mantram* given to him was probably the *Mohun mantram*, which induces ocular delusions, and is not one specifically dealing with Ganesh.

The guru's views on the earliest inhabitants of India and modern Brahmins were interesting.

"In the far south of India lived the black people. Your scientists call them Dravidians. We Aryans, when we came, called them *Dasyus*, or demons; for they killed animals and men to please their gods. They recognized us as their spiritual superiors, and they still do so. Yet their old beliefs are as strong in them to-day as they were then!"

"But many of them have become Christians," I ventured.

"Many of those whom your missionaries have converted

## *Indian Mosaic*

*profess* Christianity, in order to better their standing in the eyes of the higher castes, or to gain social or business advantages. Tippu Sultan confronted sixty thousand Indian Christians with the choice between death or becoming Moslems, and not one of them chose death. Mass conversion is no conversion. The lower castes use it as a lever because they want to be our equals." He smiled. "There is a caste called Puliahs; the presence of one of them pollutes a Brahmin; yet if a lower caste comes near him he will take seven baths. . . . The faith given to a man by his ancestors is hidden in his blood; and, even though it be disowned for generations, it sometimes takes but little to awaken it. Many Brahmins are but Brahmins in name. The Brahmins of Kashmir, for example, are not strict Brahmins."

I looked incredulous.

"I am not of this land," he continued in English. "*They* will eat food cooked by Mohammedans—forbidden things like pork, garlic, mushrooms, eggs, and chickens. The breaking of caste rules is a sin. Not so much because it is an offence against spiritual discipline, but because others look up to and trust the Brahmin as the 'Policeman of Truth.' It is like stealing bricks from a bridge, and so endangering the lives of others who use it. In the end, that which intact is strong will break. . . ."

The Brahmin caste was an organization comprising the finest intellects in the world; but, as so many priesthoods have done, it has forgotten its mission. There is a saying: "The goddess of Religion and the god of Power had a daughter—Wealth; and the daughter devoured the mother." Religion may be, as a famous modern writer has said,<sup>1</sup> a luxury which India in its present condition cannot possibly afford; but, take away from her the stabilizing influence of her religious philosophy as contained in the Vedas and the *Upanishads*, and she is spiritually bankrupt. Among a spiritu-

<sup>1</sup> Aldous Huxley, in *Jesting Pilate*

## *An Interruption*

ally bankrupt people there is neither peace nor safety. It was the late Lord Balfour, I think, who said (I quote from memory), "no religion that is compassable by our mental attributes will ever be found sufficient for our spiritual needs." The immense depth and apparent difficulty of the Hindu religious philosophy often antagonizes the inquiring Western mind; but it is peculiarly adapted to and easily understood by the naturally (more) subtle Hindu mind.

A debased, sexual Hinduism is the religion which India cannot afford.

## XXXVII

### *I Start Yoga*

Be it remembered that the human mind never recommends self-sacrifice to itself, or self-abnegation. The power which produces these conditions must therefore be beyond the mind.

.. This superior Power is the Light of Atman, the Spirit of Man, flashing through the psychic medium called the heart.

HARI PRASAD SHASIKI, *A Path to God-realization*

**A**CTING upon the guru's advice, I went alone to a hill-top to practise the Yoga exercises he had taught me. I ought to have done them in the morning, but it had not been possible.

The day was declining, and the shadows of evening were stretched upon the quiet earth. Over the fields a low-hanging mist of an opaline blue drifted, like smoke rising through a veil of olive green here and there darkening to blackness. A thin, far-away reedy piping—a familiar voice from a more familiar India—came to me faintly. Through a break in a bank of heavy clouds glared an oval of crimson light like an angry eye. A few slender columns of smoke rose from the mud roofs of a village, and as the light breeze swayed them they broke and vanished like palm-trees in a mirage. To-day the written record of my feelings at that moment makes me smile. "So," I told myself, in a state of mild exaltation, "will Yoga cause to vanish the trees of Ignorance that obscure my spiritual view!"

I sat down in the prescribed attitude.

What, exactly, had I been doing for the past few minutes? Or was it half an hour? Or an hour? Sitting straight-backed and crossed-legged with eyes shut; closing one nostril with an index finger and then saying, "Om"; inhaling through the other nostril and then thinking "Om" for so many

## *I Start Yoga*

seconds; then closing the other nostril and exhaling. . . . It was ridiculous! I could not do this sort of thing with any faith! It was on a par with a stupid theory I had heard of to the effect that one could "magnetize oneself by mentally contacting the ocean of magnetism outside us. . . ." Utter nonsense, of course! A sense of failure that was like a tiny pain came to me, and passed. "*Om*" and the peace of the evening—they went together; the long, sonorous harmony of the one, and the long-drawn peace of the other. But not wisdom, and this breathing business! All the guru's talk summed up to a total the accuracy of which I could not accept. Individual man was God's greatest handiwork; therefore any spiritual practice that tended to sink or destroy that individuality could not be right. There was no getting over the truth of that.

It was dark now. Against the blue-blackness of the starlit sky I could see the changeless profile of the mighty hills, steadfast as a sworn purpose. I could see the lights in the village—flickering, uncertain things, like men's theories; like the guru's theories. These things I could *see*. But I could not see Yoga. Evidently, to reach the heights of its supposed spiritual plane one needed the wings of mysticism; and I was spiritually a biped of bipeds.

A cavalcade of arrogant thoughts rode through my mind.

For the Hindus there was a personal Godhead, Iswara, whom they worshipped as the Divine Father and the Divine Mother *and* the highest aspect of Brahma, the All—the Absolute. Well, then, it seemed to me that Iswara, the Aspect, was inferior to Brahma, the All. In our Trinity all three Persons are comfortingly equal—and, we most of us conceive, entirely masculine in their attributes, as if the Feminine were something shameful or unhallowed. The Hindu belief in *Shakti*, the female or 'loving' aspect (or half) of their gods—the pure form of it, not the debased Tantric form which makes it a worship of lust—seemed to

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me to be astonishingly reasonable. But could soul-matter know sex? A religion that did not include in its teachings the existence of a God the Mother as well as a God the Father seemed illogical to me, as it does to the Hindus.<sup>1</sup>

These thoughts had the headiness of new wine.

The soul, or the *atman*, of man was eternal, I next reflected. Could anything temporal affect that which is eternal? How could this nostril-closing business help my soul to be better by making my brain clearer? No period of time and nothing that happened in it could make perfect something that was outside time and all its effects. . . . Yet, quite obviously, time was necessary for one to establish conscious touch with the ultimate truth. That thought was too strong to be shaken or even modified. It stood four-square on a base of common sense as solid as those darkling hills. Perhaps the very fact that I could almost at one and the same moment think of the paltriness of my life *and* the ultimate truth proved that attainment of the ultimate truth did not necessarily mean the annihilation of the human personality? Perhaps the fact that I could not think my soul's annihilation, though I could think the annihilation of all else that is, was a proof of my own immortality?

But 'perhaps' is a vague word, I decided. Mysticism was merely the iridescence on the bubble of evolution. . . . Yet a yogi was a higher manifestation of intellect than the most civilized soldier; physical courage was a fine quality, but spiritual courage was far finer. For the Hindus, Christ was a supreme yogi. He taught, they hold, the *within-ness* of God in man—not the *without-ness* faith of modern Christianity. Heart, not mind; soul, not intellect. . . . But if the mind and the intellect were fallible, why were not the heart and the soul, also fallible? The guru had answered that objection. He had said: "The higher aspect of the heart,

<sup>1</sup> I had read somewhere that the use of the word 'begotten' in the English Creed is an atavistic memory of some ancient faith that had recognized two creator-gods of opposite sexes, 'begotten,' in its root sense, implying procreation

## *I Start Yoga*

called *Buddhi* (cognitive consciousness), is, as it were, the tongue of the soul. Neither is influenced by the senses, and to the degree of their functioning in us—that is, in proportion to our realization of their existence and their qualities—we are illuminated through them. So comes to us the assurance of our one-ness with the truth that is Brahma.”

But *was* mysticism only an iridescence on the bubble of evolution? To say that mysticism is irrational merely because it is independent of the senses was nonsense, it seemed to me. That which the senses apperceive cannot be God, or Brahma. Obviously, the All—whether I called it God, or Brahma, or the Absolute—is above all relative values. The senses could not know that the soul of fire and of water is one and the same thing; nor could the intellect comprehend “*That* which is both Formed and Formless: which is the Immutable in the Mutable; Mortal and Immortal; Stationary, yet Moving.” Common sense ruled it out. . . . But I knew by intuition that it was so. “Intuition,” the guru had said, “is higher than common sense.<sup>1</sup> Intuition tells us that everything whatsoever is *Be-ing*.” I could understand that. No man’s knowledge is dependent upon his power to define it. I could also understand that, if there is—and there can be—only one form of *Be-ing*, then I was one with the All, because I shared its *be-ing*.

Even though everything I saw might be *maya*, to see even *maya* demands a self that sees. Therefore, of my own personal existence I was sure. And I was equally sure of the existence in the shell that was me of an indestructible Something—Spirit or Soul. *That* was Me. My body was not Me. “The knower is separate from the known.” Yogis looked into their souls in order to try and understand themselves—their soul being the closest and most intimate manifestation of truth available to them. I no longer saw any selfishness in

<sup>1</sup> In our times Professor Bergson has proved conclusively that intuition is superior to reason. The Hindu *rishis*, or saintly sages of old, called intuition *Buddhi*, the principle or aspect of the soul that can perceive and appreciate God.



## *Indian Mosaic*

the ascetic's withdrawal from the world. It was a transcending of that aspect of God (or Brahma) that consists of only material phenomena, to awaken in the world of ultimate reality or supreme values. I felt that I had a full comprehension of it. It was a one-man-at-a-time path that unquestionably could lead to truth; and, since no one else can tread any path for one, those ascetics naturally trod it alone. (One cannot think of the Infinite and 'objects' at the same time; discrimination must first cease. For the Hindu, 'the Infinite' means far more than our Western 'limitlessness,' which is but an aspect of it. But I had also learned that, to discriminate, the mind must be kept down to the material plane. Through isolation it can mount to a higher plane. In his deepest emotions and his greatest moments, therefore, Man is fore-ordained to Aloneness. And since Aloneness is a God-characteristic—God being non-duality—it is therefore stamped with Greatness.)

The guru had said that time, space, and the law of cause and effect were *maya*; and that God—being logically outside time—lived in an eternal present. Well, there could be no question of clocks and time-tables in eternity. But, if time were *maya*, then all events were a series of processes like waves in a sea, occurring in what has been called "a static condition of Creative Duration." Waves are only the visible effect of vibrations passing through a motionless whole.

*Maya*, as I understood it, did not mean that the world is unreal in the sense that a dream is unreal; that the mountains I was looking at were not actually there. It meant that what I saw was not the mountain as it really was—a thing composed of strata, interstices, and a jumble of geological constituents that were in themselves—each of them—a mass of atoms every one of which contained a terrifyingly minute, exact, and furiously working model of a planetary system. (And, in each electron—what?) I did not see—no one could see—any more than the outside of all these other wonders

## *I Start Yoga*

contained in the mass of the mountain. What I could see, therefore, was not the mountain as it was integrally, but merely its outward form. In that sense, life is *maya*; for the God that is in every particle of the phenomenal world is not see-able as God.<sup>1</sup>

I apprehended the human longing for spiritual permanence as a sort of atavistic instinct; a perfectly justifiable yearning for a larger existence to which the soul belonged, from which it had come, and to which one day it would return through self-realization. . . . "The Cosmic is greater than the Historic."<sup>2</sup>

Was I going mad, or becoming spiritually sane? Was I fogged and bogged, or was I dimly seeing the truth? Swedenborg, I knew, had a theory that thinking starts and corresponds with respiration. My breathing at the moment was unusually slow and regular. Was it then, a case of 'fast breathing, stupid thinking'? I do not know. I have merely set down, as well as I can, something of what I felt when, sitting alone on that hill-top, I wrestled with my mind. Wholeheartedly and with all the strength of my soul, I had longed to find Truth. I now believed myself to be surrounded by it. It was useless, then, to seek that which I was already existing in . . . and by which I was permeated. I was a visible, tangible, consciously thinking part of Infinity, content to know my powerlessness to master that which permeated and surrounded me, yet finding an indescribable sense of security in my helplessness—just as I had done when great breakers had lifted me, and I had shouted at their mightiness and dived into them, as happy as a child in its mother's arms. I wanted, now, to dive into the deeper levels of consciousness. . . .

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, deeper theories of *maya* but I knew nothing of them in those days. In any case, their discussion would not be germane to a simple book of this kind.

<sup>2</sup> The saintly Shri Dadaji Maharaj, of Aligarh, whose teachings are now being promulgated in England, said to his learned disciple Hari Prasad Shastri: "The Absolute 'I' talk of is not 'almost nothing,' as some Western philosophers state. I am talking of *you*, of you as a spiritual entity. You as spirit *are* absolute!" "*Tat tvam asi!*" ["That thou art!"]" He was, of course, quoting from the Vedis.

## *Indian Mosaic*

I rose. I would go to the guru at once and tell him I could not practise Yoga. I would try to describe to him the state of my mind. . . . Yet I did not want to be drawn into dialectical skirmishings, partly because should he defeat my reasons I was not prepared to withdraw them in favour of theoretical conquerors. What I had found unaided I was entitled to keep. Also, I wanted this fight for self-determination between my soul and my intellect to be waged in my own time and upon ground of my own choosing. It should be fought out inside me; and, as none ever witnessed the result of such fights, none should witness the outward vicissitudes of mine. There would come to me, I felt sure, comforting revelations and deeper spiritual experiences; and also many a driving back by slaughterous hosts of doubts. But each repulse and each doubting would only be a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

Of all these things I was certain.

The thought of hoisting a mystical skull and cross-bones and challenging all the recognized philosophies and Yogas with an independently conceived philosophy—or Yoga!—of my own was pleasantly thrilling. Then, suddenly, I saw that any such system would not, in fact, be original. It would merely be my reaction to the coming of truth, which had found me in that abandonment of passiveness or state of spiritual receptivity which I conceived to be the logical outcome of intense meditation.

Still, such thoughts as these, I decided, proved conclusively that I needed no guru, and no 'breathings.'

*Or had they come because of them?*

## XXXVIII

### *Ave—Atque Vale!*

My limbs move forward, while my heart flies back,  
Like silken standard borne against the breeze.

KALIDASA, *Sakuntala*

**B**EFORE leaving Kashmir I went to pay my respects to His Highness the Maharajah, in Srinagar, an audience having been arranged for me by the guru.

The double flight of broad white steps that led up to the palace were lapped by the waters of the Jhelum river, and reminded me of Venice.

A portly officer of the personal staff was waiting to receive me at the top of the stairway, where a strip of red carpet with glittering brass rods at two of the intervening levels crossed the broad veranda and continued into the shadowy interior. To one who had been living for weeks in an eighty-pound tent the entrance hall, with its lofty pillars and vistas of long passages, gave an overwhelming impression of dignity and spaciousness, despite chandeliers of cut crystal that were hung with red and green glass balls of a size that made those used in Christmas-tree decorations seem like shrivelled peas, and under which I dimly recollect walking.

I had been given no description of the Maharajah's personal appearance. I expected that one of the greatest of India's princes would be an imposing figure, clad in glittering Oriental splendour. Instead, there shuffled across the audience chamber the bent figure of a small man over seventy years of age, clad in white muslin and wearing a huge, loosely-wound white turban that gave him a ludicrous appearance of topheaviness. He was accompanied by two A.D.C.'s, and was holding an uncut lime—probably because of its

## *Indian Mosaic*

refreshing coolness, for the limp hand he gave me was hot and dry.

A few remarks to the effect that the guru . . . "whom we greatly revere" . . . had spoken to him about me; an intimation that I was free to make use of any of the various State bungalows and shooting-lodges; a question or two about my impressions of Kashmir—and the audience was at an end. With a kindly smile, he said that I was to go to my houseboat in the State barge, which was later to take him for a pleasure trip.

Just before he disappeared from sight I saw him give an impatient shove to the huge white turban, which had sloped loosely at an angle.

The old Maharajah was much loved by his people. Whenever there was a fire in his capital—as used often to happen, for the houses of Srinagar were mostly built of wood—he was one of the first to arrive on the scene of the conflagration, and would comfort, personally, those rendered homeless by the disaster. Whenever he had to sanction a death sentence he fasted and prayed for twenty-four hours before signing the order for execution. . . .

English mail was waiting for me when I got back to the *Pearl*. It contained bad news. My mother, who had been in failing health for some months, was worse. I ought to come home as soon as possible, my father considered.

I sent a telegram and a cable, and started off to see the guru. This call from home was a sharp reminder that the end of my leave was near, and as I walked I reviewed the various incidents of a brief acquaintance that had done much to change my views of India and her people. I found him writing letters in an upper room of the house overlooking the beautiful Dal lake which the Maharajah had given him.

"Has some trouble come to you?"

I told him.

He considered me gravely. "Please go on to the veranda

## *Ave—Atque Vale!*

for a few minutes. The view from up here is very beautiful. I will come to you," and the reed pen began to scratch. . . .

In what is probably the loveliest lake in the world were mirrored encircling mountains and white clouds. The afternoon was breezeless, and in the garden below there were many birds.

When he joined me I half expected that, by a supernatural faculty with which my imagination had endowed him, he would be able to tell me whether my mother would recover. I asked the question, but he disappointed me, just as he had done when I asked him whether I would one day meet the girl of the miniature. On that occasion he had answered that though she was *maya*, perhaps one day I should know her. In which there was much that was vague and nothing that was definite.

"Your mother is little and old, and sickness for such persons is difficult. But I think you will see her."

(Now my mother was *petite*, but she was not old; yet when in a few weeks' time I saw her again, she had aged twenty years.)

"It is hot," he went on. "I shall give coolness to your head!"

In a language I did not understand he spoke to a servant, who a few minutes later brought to him a basin, towels, and a small silver flask. My astonishment may be conceived when, without more ado, he set to work and shampooed my head with perfumed oil!

With an uncomfortable feeling that this, to me, extraordinary proceeding must have amused those of his followers who had stood watching us, I thanked him when it was over. But all was not yet finished. Taking from a small silver plate a short triple length of worsted intertwined with tinsel, he tied it about my right wrist.

"*Acharayosti! Shishyoham!*"

Mechanically, and without understanding them, I repeated

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the Sanskrit words, mumbling helplessly—as one does in a surprising situation that seems to leave little else to be done. When I was asked to write this book I endeavoured to find out what those two words could have been; and, hearing an authority on such matters speak them to me inquiringly, I at once recognized them. “*Acharayostu! Shishyoham!*” means: “Thou art the guru! I am the *chela*!”—the salutation of an accepted *chela* to his guru, in fact. Doubtless, in order that the ancient rite of adopting a *chela* should be completed, the words I should have said to him he said for me.

Then, completely mystified, I took five different flowers he handed to me; but I can only remember the names of three of them: a yellow Maréchal Niel rose, a sprig of honeysuckle, and a spray of jasmine.

My obvious confusion made him laugh heartily.

“Now we shall talk a little,” he said. “Afterwards we shall take tea.”

He spoke to me of Life.

“All sorrows have their compensation. We make a mistake in measuring our joys and sorrows by their duration, instead of by their intensity. There is perhaps a *unit* of mental sensation—a unit of joy, a unit of sorrow; just as there may be a measurable unit of pain. The ‘horse-power’”—he used the word *tarkut*, ‘strength’—“‘of sensation’ contained in a few minutes’ happiness, may equal the ‘horse-power of sensation’ in a worry that lasts as many weeks. We all have many little joys, each day. But we forget them immediately they are past; for instance, the scent of a flower, the song of a bird, the sun in a raindrop, the smile of a friend, and so on. But all these, if they were added together, would be found to balance an equal amount of unhappiness. All things must balance in the end. There is an inerrable mathematic of human conduct. The Infinite Wisdom that is God could not create any system of things in which a single in-

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accuracy was possible—let alone create a system in which millions of inaccuracies seem to be occurring every minute.”

That tea-party differed little from the first we had had together in the Achibal garden, save that just before it he said he had ‘a surprise’ for me. This consisted of music played by an orchestra of three Punjabis. Most of the airs were native ones, and to some of them he sang the words.

When I asked leave to depart he made a sign to the musicians, and at once they started to play a halting version of *The Old Folks at Home*, the strains of which were followed by a very decrepit *Annie Laurie*. As we crossed the garden together the ‘band’ was ushering in a frenzied *John Peel*.

He accompanied me on my way for more than a mile. But of what he said there is little that I can record, save that he told me things, which, during troubles that soon came, comforted me.

There was evidently going to be a heavy rainstorm; so we quickened our pace; it was obvious to me that unless he started back at once he would arrive home drenched.

“You had better turn back, *guru-ji!*”

“Yes, I will go back. You will walk quicker without me.”

I see him now, standing a moment against a background of lashing and creaking poplars, the cloth of his white Brahmin’s robes and a sort of saffron cloak blown against his stately form and fluttering and flapping behind him in the strong wind; his face is lit by the last flare of an orange-coloured sky rapidly disappearing from sight in a mass of purplish-black storm-cloud . . . and that day he was wearing patent-leather Oxford shoes—in my honour, as he told me. As usual, he carried a walking-stick.

We each joined our hands upon our breasts, palm to palm.

The next morning my servants told me, to my surprise, that we had had an earthquake during the night, and that the guru had come to see whether I was safe. He had walked the



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three miles to Nedou's Hotel, in which I had taken up my quarters for the night, after paying off the *manji* as somebody else wanted the houseboat.

The vague sense of foreboding that had come to me after I had said good-bye to the guru had increased formidably by the time I had reached Nowshera. Strangely enough, I felt none of the longing to see England which used to come to me so strongly during the long hot-weather days in the plains; instead, there was in my mind an intermittent apprehension; not so much about my mother as about going home at all. I felt that I was returning to an aspect of life which had always been a little difficult, because it was so different from an imaginary world which I had created for myself. I was sorry to leave a vague 'something' which, if it had not entirely mastered my restlessness, had made me irrevocably fond of it. The thought of leaving my Mule Corps was not the cause of this uneasiness, even though I was deeply attached to my men and animals; nor was it the thought of leaving the guru; the idea of meeting him again anywhere but in Kashmir in two years' time (he had said that that would happen) had never entered my head; quite illogically, I looked upon him as an integral part of that majestic and enchanting country. . . . Repeatedly I tried to puzzle out what it could be. I sensed it most strongly in my house and garden, as if some unrecognized and unhappy spirit were wandering there. The little red-brick bungalow with its rose-covered pergolas and varied flower-beds had become a fortress in which for my inner self there was safety and peace—precious things that, in going to England, I was foolishly deserting. Life, once more a-quiver with uncertainty, was like a shaken web across which the black spider of loneliness—temporarily driven into invisibility—was about to rush down and devour me. . . . And there was a pale ghost from St Moritz.

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Although the half-way point of my Indian service was not yet reached, I had learned much and changed much. But I knew that that which I had learned would be of no interest to those at home, for it was too remote from their way of looking at things. I also knew that the change in me, if I could explain it at all, would not be approved. . . . And then, shut in by the smallness of England—how small England seemed, compared with India!—I would hear poignant references and . . . meet grief more really than I had yet done. Perhaps an unexpectedly grey sky and a fine rain that was falling tended to depression—that, and the emptiness of the bungalow. I had paid off all but two of my servants. Most of the furniture had gone. The baby-grand, in its heavily-battered packing-case, was standing on its edge like a monstrous harp, resting on bricks set in tin trays filled with water to protect it against white ants. The *mali* and the *chowkidar* were going to look after the bungalow and would keep the tins filled. The matting, rolled and tied, lay in huge 'sausages' ready to be carted down to the quarter-master's store in the lines. Above a writing-table bare of papers, the punkah hung down as motionless as the dropped centre-board of a yacht in dry dock.

Suddenly I remembered that I had not said good-bye to the two R.C. padres. If I drove over at once in the Corps tonga I could just manage it.

To think was to act. . . .

The senior Catholic chaplain was a burly and bearded Dutchman with a roof-shaking laugh, who delighted in talking about his beloved Holland and its cigars. . . . " *Vier voor dubbeltje!* [Four for twopence!] Think of it!" he would roar; whereupon his Irish fellow-priest, a tubby little man, would retort that Holland might be a very fine country, but it didn't produce whisky! . . . They were a lovable pair.

As I shook hands with the Dutchman I wondered whether he envied me in going home. Generally, the Mill Hill

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Missionaries leave for the Foreign Missions never to return, and he had an invalid sister of whom he was very fond.

"I wish you were coming with me, padre," I said, with a robust tactlessness.

"So do I!" It was laughed—defiantly. Then, "We shall be glad to see you back! We are all of us India's grown-up children, you know!"

Standing in the poop of the ship, I watched the low coast-line fade upon the horizon. It seemed impossible that, remote and isolated in the great quiet spaces that stretched for so many thousands of miles west, east, and north behind that line of darkness that was palm-trees, there could be a bungalow, friends, dogs, and ponies that were mine, and waiting for me to return. The vastness of it seemed incommensurate with the existence of things so small.

"I want you to look upon India as your mother; to feel that you are sending roots deep into her. She will be kind to you. . . ." Olive had said that. . . . "We are, all of us, grown-up children of India!" That was the padre. . . .

India! India! All—everything—was India!

I clapped a hand to my pocket.

I had left the miniature behind!

I remembered, clearly, seeing it standing on the mantel-piece amidst a litter of spare luggage labels in the bare front room. That same 'Something' had prompted me to delay packing it until the last minute, and in that sudden dash to the padres it had passed from my mind. . . . Perhaps I should find it when I returned. Meanwhile, India had kept, as she always does, that which is really hers. It was an Indian-made picture of an Indian girl—of one who was, herself, *India*.

I stood looking down at the white wake of the vessel with its glistening snaky curls and swirls and its seething hissing and breaking bubbles. I was able, *now*, to translate that vague unquietness of spirit. It was *India* that I did not want

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to leave: the India of strange temples and gentle peoples; the India that had once meant exile, and had now become my home. Olive was India. The guru was India. My work was India. In losing the miniature I had found Her whom it represented.

*She was India!*

In six months time I should come back to Her again.



## EPILOGUE

From the East comes Light; from the West Law.

*Oriental saying*

THE "Wisdom of the East" is no myth; it is a name for a great reality. The East is the birthplace of religion and civilization. Its fundamental difference from the West might be defined by saying: The East is a circle with a centre point—Wisdom; and the West an ellipse with two foci—Material Progress and Academic Thought.

Broadly speaking, we of the West take the myth point of view; or, if we admit the greatness of the wisdom, we say that asceticism is incompatible with modern civilization and that we have no need of what we call—with unintentional truth—"Indian mental gymnastics," generally meaning thereby Yoga.

Both points of view are fundamentally false. The first can only be held by such as have never read an enlightened book on Indian philosophy, though—remembering the devilish power of the printed word—for a just appraisal of that philosophy some preliminary instruction by a qualified guru is desirable, and even essential. Such men are to be found.

The second point of view is erroneous because what are perhaps the two greatest of India's philosophic classics—the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*—very definitely teach that a life of worldly activity, if it be centred on God, is superior to an ascetic existence. There is therefore no question of incompatibility, or of having to give up any of the benefits which civilization has given us. On the contrary, a guru will say that we should hold fast to them and to our religion, whatever it may be, and, by absorbing this Indian

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wisdom and making its philosophic truths part of our civilization, enrich with contentment our daily lives and bring ourselves closer to the attainment of a world brotherhood and peace transcending the rivalries of faiths and creeds. Denial of this view is surely a *reductio ad absurdum*; already we are careful to assimilate far inferior wisdom from other and Western countries, and "the whole is greater than the part!"

But there is to-day an increasing feeling that the acceptance by the individual of a wider responsibility for his own salvation—the vindication of the human conscience, in fact—is a correct theological standpoint<sup>1</sup>; and that in the perception of the Godhead there is no essential difference between the God-realization of what might be called "the spiritually uneducated mind" and that of the most highly inspired spiritual consciousness. There are those who, although they know nothing of the teachings of the Messiah (given to the world by that same East), nevertheless live highly spiritual lives. The Hindus had evolved the stupendous Vedic philosophy, and known civilizations that were in some ways far higher than ours of to-day, thousands of years before we adopted woad in order to prove that we were not naked savages.

It was never my intention in *Indian Mosaic* to attempt an academic examination of any of the Hindu Scriptures, or of any system of Yoga. Still less was it my aim to compare the teachings of Our Lord with those of the Hindu Scriptures. Yet, so far as I know, there is nothing in the spiritual concept of the Hindu philosophy that runs counter to the teachings of Christ. Indeed, were that the case the Hindu philosophic point of view would not have been allowed to influence my life to the extent which it has done. There is no faith more simple and beautiful than the teachings of Christ, and in it is contained the system of meditation best suited to our Western minds, and therefore safest for our practising.

<sup>1</sup> David Graham's *Religion and Intellect* (T and T Clark) is a brilliant and convincing exposition of this view.

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"But," it may be objected, "*Indian Mosaic* deals throughout with something that is far from the teachings of the Galilean." To which I would reply: To show the nearness of these things to Him and to His teachings is not the aim of this book. That is for others more qualified than I to do. My own belief is that, while there are many creeds, there is only one basic belief, and that all real believers are united in God, here on earth, as Balmokund said.

At the time when the incidents narrated in this book happened I knew nothing of the political state of India; and, *Indian Mosaic* not being a political book but a series of pictures, to discuss in detail the Indian problem would be far outside its scope. That too is for wiser heads than mine. Yet a few general remarks may not be out of place.

A century ago an earnest missionary and student of India, the Abbé Dubois, who spent most of his life studying the Indians, wrote a prophetic paragraph in the preface to his famous *Manners and Customs of the Hindu People*. He said:

Since our European ways, manners, and customs, so utterly different from theirs, do not allow of our winning their confidence, let us continue to earn their respect and admiration by humane examples of compassion, generosity, and well-doing. Let us leave them their cherished laws and prejudices, since no human effort will persuade them to give them up, even in their own interests, let us not, by thwarting them, risk making the gentlest and most submissive people in the world infuriated and unmanageable. Let us take care lest we bring about by some hasty, imprudent course of action, catastrophes which would reduce the country to a state of anarchy and desolation and ultimate ruin; for, in my humble opinion, the day when the Government attempts to interfere with any of the more important religious and civil usages of the Hindus will be the last of its existence as a political power.<sup>1</sup>

One hundred years ago!

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in L. Carré's *L'Inde*, p. 97. I have not seen the passage in its entirety in any English edition.



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It is significant that those who demand self-government for India and who criticize Great Britain for failing to grant it are generally those who are most signally unqualified to express an opinion, being completely ignorant of the art of governing peoples. They are, in fact, either visionaries or opportunists, those most-to-be-feared exploiters of credulity. But if the rule of a conqueror nation ought to teach those whom it governs the newest methods of mass murder, a savage intolerance, a debased materialism, and an unjust and inhumane rule—then indeed British rule has failed in India. But to blame a whole nation for the bad effects of occasional maladministration by some isolated official—as is sometimes done—is both foolish and unjust. Among twelve men chosen by the Son of God Himself there was one who was a failure. What seems to be failure is sometimes necessary to the accomplishment of a great good.

Nationalism—that hybrid product of *parvenu* civilizations—has been grafted on to an ancient tree whose roots are deep in Wisdom, whose sap is faithfulness, and whose branches are wide lands. The fruit it will now bear will be bitter and sourly antithetical to the Hindus, the central teaching of whose faith is the annihilation of Self. Whether these two things be reconcilable or not, there is no question which of them is the greater. Other nations have found to their cost that, in seeking to free themselves from an allegiance to God, they have become the bond-slaves of a sanguinary materialism.

The problem of India is neither political nor social, but religious; and it has many aspects, for there are many 'Indias.' There is, for example, the India that is in each of her 500,000 villages with their centuries of tongues; there is the India of her great cities—an India alien in many ways to the rest; there is the India of the millions dwelling in her hills and forests whom the ethnologist, in his pride, dubs 'aborigines.' There is an India that is primitive; and there is an India that

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is beautiful. I knew and loved them all. But there has come into being a 'provincial' India as narrow-minded and as fanatical as any backward townlet in the West. Those who, like myself, knew the real, serenely dignified India, look upon this bawling monstrosity and deplore it for *this* is no legitimate heir to one of the greatest national heritages in the world. But it will, please God, die a natural death—if its Indian doctors are merciful and wise.

At present India is unfit to govern herself. Only by gradually assimilating such of our Western methods as are truly good can she ever hope to become fit for self-government; and it will take many years. To abandon to fanatics, visionaries, opportunists, and those routine exploiters of simple faith an India which in the mass still implicitly believes in us would be nothing short of shameful betrayal, and we should richly deserve whatever horrors its perpetration brought upon us.

Much of what is happening to-day in India is said to be good. Perhaps the crying of her bewildered peoples will awaken her Brahmin sons from the spiritual apathy into which they have fallen, and shame them into renewing the faltering faith of their ancestors. Woe indeed to us that, in discrediting Brahminical authority, we should have prised loose the keystone of an arch the falling of which may involve the Empire. Those with any real knowledge of the facts know well enough the advantage it would be to the peoples of India and to us to have at all times, and especially during the present trend of world affairs, a strong and self-governed India. It is unthinkable that India and England, so closely united for two centuries, should now mutually fail to have a sympathetic understanding of each other's difficulties, for it has been mutually earned. The way to it lies in a deeper psychological understanding of the Indian. After all, is our Western civilization so beneficent, so effective, so ideal in its sense of government that we have the right to call the

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tranquil contentment of the Indian masses the result of a 'pig-trough philosophy'? Is our obsession of defending ourselves more admirable than the Indian's steady efforts to govern his Self? Surely the material can never be greater than the spiritual! If we have a Wisdom of the West, are we manifesting it? In any case, we have no monopoly of wisdom. The Indian thinker who maintains that our Western civilization is doomed seems to be justified by the present state of Europe. "Where there is no vision the people perish" still stands a four-square truth. With us religion is a minor consideration; with the Indian it is a major one. For the latter, as A. M. Rihbany says,<sup>1</sup> "man does not make his spiritual possibilities; he discovers them."

We are a common-sense nation; since both India and ourselves have a common purpose, obviously a common heart is necessary if we are to attain it.

Public attention has recently been drawn to an astonishing state of affairs—a shortage of the right kind of Briton for the recruitment of the Indian services. Now, no other country on the surface of the globe offers to an ambitious and sporting youngster as many attractive possibilities as India does. Were she better known to England there would be—as there was when I went out—no such dearth of suitable recruits; there would be a waiting-list that would make "A.B." pray, with unaccustomed fervour, to see his son's name included in it. But, alas, only the other day I was informed that in the libraries of two big schools there was not a single book on India!

Naturally, I love the Indian Army, not only because it is the finest army in the world and the loyalty of its brotherhood surpassed by none, but because in it hard work is certain to get its reward; there is no favouritism, and no backstairs way to success. Its motto is 'Fair play,' and it hates with a relentless hatred the genus 'Boot-licker'—the 'Tank-

<sup>1</sup> *Wise Men from the East and from the West* (Melrose).

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fish ' as we called them, because they grub their sustenance from the bottom, instead of seeking it in open waters.

To conclude:

There may be those who think me prejudiced in favour of the Hindus and their philosophy. I will therefore quote another pregnant paragraph—this time from the pen of the late Professor F. Max Müller of Oxford University and Privy Councillor to the first Empress of India, surely, in terms of human understanding, the greatest Western Sanskritist of all time. In *India: What it can Teach Us* he said:

If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India





